

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for
Sunday, 25 October 2020**

Children's Talk: "Seeing the Lord, Even in Rocks"

- Can you see the Lord in this rock?
- How about in a handful of dirt?
 - Some people see the Lord in these things; some people don't.

- We're going to be talking about nature today and for the next few weeks.
- Nature is amazing!
 - Have you watched nature documentaries?
 - Huge mountains, or waterfalls, or coral reefs under water with all the brightly coloured fish.
 - There are so many amazingly beautiful places to go around the world.
 - And there are even amazing things in nature all around us right now.
 - Right now, whether you're in church or at home, I would bet that you can see something amazing from nature from where you're sitting, if you look hard enough.
 - The flowers behind me on the chancel are amazing if you look at them carefully.
 - The sunlight coming in the window.
 - The fact that the air around us contains chemicals that our bodies can breathe in and use to keep going.

- All of these things just get cooler the more you learn about them.
 - A good question to think about is why?
 - Why is nature so amazing, and complicated, and beautiful?
 - Some people say that it's just because Nature happens to be really cool.
 - But the Bible says that it's because of the Lord.

- Psalm 95:1-7 (NKJV)
 - 1 Oh come, let us sing to the LORD!
Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.
 - 2 Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving;
Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.
 - 3 For the LORD is the great God,
And the great King above all gods.
 - 4 In His hand are the deep places of the earth;
The heights of the hills are His also.
 - 5 The sea is His, for He made it;
And His hands formed the dry land.
 - 6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.
 - 7 For He is our God,
And we are the people of His pasture,
And the sheep of His hand.

- It's saying that all the things in the natural world were made by the Lord, as if He formed it all with His hands.
 - That includes us too—we were created by the Lord.
 - And so, when we look at nature we should think about the Lord.
 - That's why some people see the Lord in a rock and in a handful of dirt and other people don't.

- There's an interesting detail in the Palm Sunday story.
 - You might remember that the Lord comes riding into Jerusalem as a king and people are celebrating and rejoicing and praising God and some are shouting, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:38).
 - And then there's this conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees:
 - Luke 19:39-40 (NKJV)
 - ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples."
 - ⁴⁰ But He answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."
- Some people can see that the Lord is an amazing person right there with them; some people can't see it.
 - It might have been that the Lord could have made even the stones praise Him but that wasn't necessary.
 - But, in another way, even the stones today cry out to praise the Lord.
- Look at this stone.
 - On the outside it's rough and normal looking—it doesn't look like anything special—but if you look inside it, you see incredible colours and beauty.
 - When I see that kind of beauty, I see the work of the Lord's hand.
- What about a boring looking stone, can you see the Lord in it?
- How about a handful of dirt?
 - Sometimes you can see the Lord by thinking about usefulness.
 - Think of all the things that you could do with that rock.
 - Play a game with it.
 - Draw with it.
 - Mix it with cement and sand to make concrete.
 - Make a drain with it.
 - Make a path with it.
 - And the handful of dirt, think of all the thousands of different plants that could use that dirt as food to grow.
 - Or as part of the ground to give it a firm foundation to get rooted in.
- Today, challenge yourself to go find something in nature and see if you can see how the Lord is in it.
- And then think about how the Lord also made you.
- *Amen.*

Nature, Part 1: The Mineral Kingdom & Structure

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith
25 October 2020

Intro

- Why are we doing a sermon series on nature or the natural world?
- In part, I thought it could be a nice change of pace or change in spiritual diet.
 - When the Lord was teaching people about worry and anxiety He invited them to “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow....” (Matthew 6:28; Luke 12:27).
 - There is something useful to us in contemplating the spiritual significance of the things in the natural world around us.
- Another reason is that, if you can better understand the connection between the natural world and the spiritual world, that will help you when you’re reading the Word to better understand the relationship between the natural things in the literal sense of the Word and the spiritual things that they correspond to.
- But really what I’m hoping to help you see that the natural world in all its mind-blowing complexity is best understood as a world of spiritual effects, constantly being recreated by an amazingly wise and loving God.
 - That’s the goal anyway, we’ll see how we go.
- Today, we’re going to first talk about some general ideas how to think about the natural world.
- And then we’ll talk specifically about the mineral kingdom.
 - And in future weeks we’ll focus on the vegetable kingdom and animal kingdom.

How to Think About the Natural World

- We often think of understanding the natural world as the domain of science.
- When pastors start talking about scientific concepts it can start to make scientifically-minded people rather squirmy.
 - “Oh no... what embarrassingly inaccurate or incomplete explanation is he going to give now?”
- And, at certain points in history, science and religion have been in open conflict.
 - Galileo, for example, was famously convicted of heresy for publicising the view that the Earth went around the sun, which was seen to be in conflict with the teachings of the Catholic Church at the time.
- What about now?
- When I’ve been in conversations with people new to the New Church, one of the things I often say is that “Other denominations of Christianity see a conflict between what science says and what the Bible says but the New Church doesn’t. Why should God’s creation and God’s revelation—both being from the same God—be in conflict with each other?”
 - Let’s give ourselves some high fives and pats on the back for being smarter than other people and move on.
 - Except that I’ve been realising that it’s not quite that simple.
- For one thing, what people mean by “science” is a huge number of diverse fields of study!
 - We can’t make blanket statements about all of that in one go.
 - Some of what people call “science” is not scientific at all.
 - And some of it is just wrong.
 - So we can’t really say that the New Church isn’t in conflict with all of science.

- It most certainly *is* in conflict with certain ideas that people consider to be “science”.
- And the teachings of the New Church would also say that even the best scientific findings—with repeatable results, that has been vigorously peer-reviewed and discussed—even that kind of science is lacking something.
 - That kind of information is very useful and also incomplete.
- There’s a funny passage about this in the book *Divine Providence* in the teachings of the New Church, where Swedenborg writes this:
 - *Divine Providence* §213
 - But please, I say to the natural person, write two books and fill them with plausible, probable and likely arguments, arguments you judge to be solid—one book in support of a person’s own prudence, one in support of nature—and then put them into the hand of any angel; and I know that the angel will write at the end these few words: “They are all appearances and fallacies.”
 - Any explanation of reality that explains it just in terms of nature being the cause of it all or human beings’ own ability to figure things out for themselves is an explanation that is just “appearances and fallacies.”
 - It’s an explanation of how things *appear* to be but not how they really *are*.
 - I know of one New Church high school teacher who had his students take their science text books and write in them, “This is all appearances and fallacies.”
 - Does that make you feel uncomfortable and a little embarrassed to be associated with people who might do that?
- What’s lacking from the scientific perspective?
- It’s attempting to explain everything in terms of what we can observe in the natural world.
 - Again, that is a very useful and fruitful thing to do.
- But it ignores the influence of the spiritual world.
 - And the teachings of the New Church would say that the best way to understand the natural world is in terms of its relationship with the spiritual world.
 - *Divine Love and Wisdom* §315
 - The image of creation is spiritual. But for this image to be visible and serve a useful purpose in the natural world, and for it to remain fixed and endure, it must assume material form, that is to say, it must be infused with the material substances of that world.
 - The natural world is the world of effects; if you want to understand what really causes things to be how they are, then you need to understand the spiritual causes behind everything in the natural world.
- Often people who are scientifically-minded reject the idea of there being any reality to things that they cannot observe.
 - This is by no means true across the board.
 - There have been and still are many deeply religious scientists who see God’s handiwork in everything they study.
- But it’s that spiritual connection and causation that is so often missing from scientific explanations.

- We tend to believe in just what we can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch and think that anything beyond that is not real.
 - That goes for me too, by the way; I'm not somehow immune to this problem by being a pastor.
- If I'm honest I notice in myself a tendency to allow a so-called scientific explanation to be my primary way of understanding many things in life.
- And the weird thing about those scientific thoughts is that we tend to take them on blind faith.
 - That same New Church teacher who had the students write that statement in their science textbooks pointed out to me that, if he were to tell me some scientific idea, I would be likely to just believe him.
 - But if he were to tell me some idea that he has about religion based on His reading of the Word I would probably be a bit more skeptical and analytical.
 - Isn't that interesting?
 - It used to be the priests who were telling simple people to not try to understand things for themselves but just take it on faith from the experts on religion that this is how things are.
 - Now it's scientists who are in that role.
- In this incredibly complex world we simply can't take the time to evaluate every scientific claim for ourselves; that's just not practical.
- But I do think we can learn to not just take things on faith if people tell us that scientists say it.
 - We can evaluate the idea from spiritual principles and see if it rings true.
- There's a principle in the teachings of the New Church that says, "Thought from the eye closes the understanding, but thought from the understanding opens the eye" (*Divine Love and Wisdom* §46).
 - This means that a materialistic worldview based purely on what we can observe with our senses obstructs our ability to understand things clearly.
 - But when our understanding is informed by spiritual principles that opens our eyes to see confirmation of those spiritual principles even in the natural world around us.
- This passage explains it well:
- *Secrets of Heaven* §129
 - If we seize... on the premise that we will believe nothing until we see and understand it, we will never be able to believe anything. Spiritual and heavenly concepts remain beyond the range of our eyesight, beyond the grasp of our imagination.

The proper method is to become wise from the Lord, that is, from his Word. Then all things follow as they should, and in addition light is shed on our rational thinking and factual knowledge.

By no means, you see, is the acquisition of knowledge forbidden. Knowledge is useful for our lives, and pleasurable. For a person who is in faith no prohibition exists on thinking and speaking the way the well-educated of the world do. But we are to do so on the principle of belief in the Lord's Word and of using earthly truth to confirm spiritual and heavenly truth so far as we can, using language familiar to the academic world. The Lord, not ourselves, must be the source of our principles. This is life; the other way is death.
- With these ideas in mind, let's now shift to talking about the mineral kingdom and see what it's like to look at things in the natural world from this spiritual perspective.

The Mineral Kingdom

- The book *Heaven and Hell* divides things in the natural world into three broad categories
 - *Heaven and Hell* §104
 - All earthly things are differentiated into three classes that we call “kingdoms,” namely the animal kingdom, the vegetable kingdom, and the mineral kingdom. Members of the animal kingdom are correspondences on the first level because they are alive. Members of the vegetable kingdom are correspondences on the second level because they merely grow. Members of the mineral kingdom are correspondences on the third level because they neither live nor grow.
 - Correspondences in the mineral kingdom are metals noble and base, stones precious and common, and soils of various kinds, as well as bodies of water.
- So we’re talking about things like iron and gold, diamonds and sandstone, and clay and bedrock, and also rivers, lakes and oceans.
- But before we get there I want to talk about things at the atomic and sub-atomic level.
 - Things in the animal and vegetable kingdoms are also made up of atoms and involve chemical reactions but somehow it seemed like this was the best time to talk about the underlying structure of things that forms the foundation for everything else, like the mineral kingdom forms the foundation for the other kingdoms.

The Atomic and Sub-Atomic Order of Creation

- And we can see spiritual things even at the level of atoms and electrons and protons, if we’re willing to.
 - *Divine Providence* §3:2
 - Everything that meets our eyes in this world can serve to convince us that the universe and absolutely everything in it was created out of divine love by means of divine wisdom. Take any particular thing and look at it with some wisdom, and this will be clear. Look at a tree—or its seed, its fruit, its flower, or its leaf. Collect your wits and look through a good microscope and you will see incredible things; and the deeper things that you cannot see are even more incredible. Look at the design of the sequence by which a tree grows from its seed all the way to a new seed, and ask yourself, “In this whole process, is there not a constant effort toward ongoing self-propagation?” The goal it is headed for is a seed that has a new power to reproduce. If you are willing to think spiritually (and you can if you want to), surely you see wisdom in this. Then too, if you are willing to press your spiritual thinking further, surely you see that this power does not come from the seed or from our world’s sun, which is nothing but fire, but that it was put into the seed by a creator God who has infinite wisdom. This is not just something that happened at its creation; it is something that has been happening constantly ever since. Maintenance is constant creation, just as enduring is a constant coming into being.
- Let’s look for confirmation of these ideas in how things work at the level of atoms.
 - In the periodic table different fundamental elements are arranged and grouped according to their atomic number and their similar chemical properties.
 - Certain groupings of the elements on the left side of the table—the Alkali Metals and Alkali Earth Metals (things like Lithium and Sodium and Magnesium and Calcium)—are all substances that want to give away electrons in chemical bonding.

- And other groupings of elements—the Halogens (like Fluorine and Chlorine)—really want to *receive* electrons.
- And so when you put something from the left together with something from the right there is a lot of reactivity and chemical bonding that takes place.
- If you want to, you can see that as a cool confirmation of the fact that there is love and wisdom throughout everything and that love and wisdom want to be joined together.
- Now let's look for confirmation of this idea that maintenance is constant creation or the idea that everything is still existing because it is continuously being recreated by the Lord through the spiritual world.
 - Here I want to venture into quantum mechanics which is even more of an area that I don't really understand.
 - There's this thing called the uncertainty principle which means that, even though we can generally know, for example, that a certain element has a certain number of electrons somewhere within certain areas or orbitals around its nuclei but we cannot be certain of the exact position and momentum of those electrons.
 - We can see that as just a curious quirk of the natural world or we can see that uncertainty as a result of the Lord constantly recreating things at that level.
 - We can't be sure where the particle is and where it's going because it's being constantly recreated moment to moment.
 - I wouldn't lean too heavily on this idea.
 - It may be that my simplistic understanding of the topic is actually missing some crucial information.
 - Or it may be that in the future people will figure out some way of reliably accounting for the position and momentum of particles.
 - And that won't invalidate the idea that the world is perpetually being recreated by the Lord; it will just mean that we need to look for different confirmations of that idea in the scientific understanding of the physical world.
 - But this is the kind of thinking about things in the natural world that I think we should be looking to do—watching for manifestations and confirmations of spiritual realities wherever we look.

The Correspondence of the Mineral Kingdom

- Now let's finally talk about the mineral kingdom specifically and what spiritual realities we can see in it and how everything in it is intimately connected to spiritual causes.
 - By the way, if you'd like to know more about how the spiritual world is connected with the natural world through what's called correspondence I recommend that you check out two sections on it in the book *Heaven and Hell* (§§87-102, §§103-115).
 - Those sections are easy to understand and really interesting.
 - Or you can read or listen to a sermon I preached about it a few years ago ("Correspondence: The Relationship Between Physical and Spiritual Things." Find the text and audio versions here: <https://bit.ly/3kpEG4Y>).
- One of the things that those sections of the book *Heaven and Hell* talk about is that the correspondence or connection between the spiritual world and the natural world is according to use.
 - The use that something performs in the natural world shows us something about the use in the spiritual world that causes that thing in the natural world to exist.

- So what is the use of the mineral kingdom?
 - Perhaps the best way to get a feel for it is to imagine if everything from the mineral kingdom were suddenly gone.
 - No rocks, mountains, metal, ceramics, dirt, sand, gems, or soil.
 - Just a bunch of plants and animals.
 - The first thing that I notice is how squishy and unsupported everything would be.
 - Psalm 104 says that the Lord “laid the foundations of the earth, so that it should not be moved forever” (5).
 - We need the mineral kingdom to have a firm foundation on which to stand and to build.
 - And we need the mineral kingdom to have the materials and tools to build with.
 - Imagine how little we could accomplish without anything as hard as rocks or strong as iron.
 - And all of the technology that we rely on today all relies on the mineral kingdom.
 - All the metal and glass and plastic of the containers and housings and all the substances inside our computers and phones and our entire electrical infrastructure.
 - We need metals to conduct electricity and other chemicals for batteries.
 - Apparently the average smartphone uses about thirty different elements from the periodic table.
 - I think it's safe to say that we need the mineral kingdom.
 - And the use of the mineral kingdom is particularly to support the higher kingdoms.
 - *Apocalypse Explained* §1208:2
 - The mineral kingdom is simply a storehouse, in which are contained and from which are taken the things of which the forms of the the animal and the vegetable kingdoms are composed.
 - There is a similar relationship between the things we know in the lower levels of our mind and the higher levels of our minds.
 - *Apocalypse Explained* §790:5
 - In order that the spiritual mind may be opened and formed it must have a storehouse from which it may draw its supplies; since unless a person has such a storehouse they are empty, and in emptiness there can be no Divine operation. This storehouse is in the natural person and it is its memory, in which everything knowable can be stored up and can be drawn forth from it. In this storehouse for the formation of the spiritual person there must be truths that are to be believed and goods that are to be done, both of them from the Word and from doctrine and preaching from the Word.
 - This the use that is represented by all the things in the mineral kingdom.
 - There are different levels within the mineral kingdom, everything from chunks of rock to precious gems.
 - And some parts of the mineral kingdom are better suited to serving the higher levels—like good soil provides the nutrients and foundation for everything in the vegetable kingdom to grow.
 - But all of it serves a foundational use.
 - And from reflecting on it we can see just how important it is that we ground our spiritual lives in living according to what the Lord teaches.

- That we have a foundation for our spiritual life in basic obedience to the Lord's commandments.
- Anything higher won't last without that foundation in knowing and doing what the Lord says.
- As the Lord Himself taught in this familiar parable about something in the mineral kingdom:
 - Luke 6:46-49 (NKJV)
 - ⁴⁶ [Jesus said,] "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? ⁴⁷ Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: ⁴⁸ He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. ⁴⁹ But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

Conclusion

- My hope and prayer is that we can all dig down deep and lay our foundations on the solid rock of living according to what the Lord teaches us in His Word.
- That we can have our minds open to see the Lord and the spiritual world in the beauty and wonder of the world around us.
- And that we can respond to all of it in grateful obedience to our loving and wise Creator.
- As it says in Psalm 104:24, 30-31, 33 (NKJV)
 - ²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all.
 -
 - ³⁰ You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;
And You renew the face of the earth.
 - ³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
May the LORD rejoice in His works.
 -
 - ³³ I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.
- *Amen.*