

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes  
for Sunday, 1 November

## Children's Talk: From Seed to Fruit

Last week Mr. Smith talked about rocks and dirt, and how even very simple things can tell us about the Lord. Today we are going to talk about another part of the Lord's creation: plants. Plants are different from rocks. Rocks don't really do much or move around a lot. But a plant grows and changes and is alive. Plants also appear, live, and then die. They don't last in the same way that rocks do. But even though plants can die, the Lord puts in all of them the ability to make more plants, so they can carry on living. Here is how it is told in the book of Genesis:

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth"; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the third day. (Genesis 1:11-13)

Notice that this mentions seeds, and fruit, which also have seeds in them. All plants have been given by the Lord the ability, through seeds, to make more plants.

So let's look at how that works, starting with a tiny little seed. This is an apple seed. It looks so small and unimportant. But if it was planted in the earth, and taken care of, it would become a mighty apple tree. The Lord has put life even in the littlest of things. Jesus compared faith, or trusting the Lord, to a tiny seed. Even if trust in the Lord starts small, it grows and grows and becomes something very important.

Of course, trees don't grow right away. First they have to put down roots and send up a trunk with branches. Then it grows leaves. Leaves are important for a tree: the leaves take light from the sun and turn it into food. The Lord feeds trees from the sun, just like He feeds us from His love and wisdom. When the time is right, the tree then gets flowers. This is one of the things that makes trees absolutely beautiful. Have you ever been in a garden full of flowers? Isn't it amazing to see all the colours and shapes they have? That beauty can remind us of the Lord's blessings.

Now the last thing that happens, if we are talking about a fruit tree, is that it makes fruit. When we think of fruit we usually think of food. Apples are for eating, right? It's like the tree is giving us a present. And really, it's the Lord that is giving us a present. It's the gift of being useful. Whenever the Word talks about fruit, or bearing fruit, like in our recitation, it's talking about the gift of being useful.

But that's not the only reason a tree has fruit. If you open up the fruit, and look on the inside, you'll see we're back to where we started: with seeds. The Lord does not only give a seed life so that it can grow into a tree, He even gives it enough life that it can go on making more and more trees, forever! This teaches us something really important about the Lord: He wants to keep giving life and love to people forever. He never stops making new life, and making sure that things keep living. Even when a person's body dies, their spirit lives on forever in heaven. Life keeps getting bigger and bigger, and better and better, and there is always some new blessing just around the corner.

*Amen.*

## Nature, Part 2: Vegetation and Growth

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn

1 November, 2020

Last week Malcolm talked about the natural world, and how all the physical stuff that makes up this world has a deeply spiritual origin. This week we continue that theme, but looking to plants. On one level, plants are just like anything else: they are made of atoms and molecules, and have a spiritual origin that reflects the Lord. But unlike inanimate things, plants grow and reproduce. They have life, and even if that life is not in any way conscious, it still reflects more fully the life that comes from the Lord. In the growth of plants we catch a glimpse of the Lord's ever-expanding and life-giving love.

From a scientific point of view, there is nothing particularly unique about the fact that plants grow. It is of course a really fascinating scientific fact. But as far as anything miraculous is concerned, there's nothing much there: the "life" that exists in plants can easily be explained as atoms and molecules and cells doing exactly what you might predict they would do given the right circumstances. There does not appear to be any need to resort to some magical life force that distinguishes living plants from dead rocks (see *Secrets of Heaven* §3648:2, 5116:5).

Yet if we adopt this attitude we entirely miss out on the reality that lies behind life. The Lord did not simply create plants and then leave them to follow their own predetermined path. Each and every growth is generated purely by something spiritual descending into this physical world:

There is also an influx from the Lord by way of heaven into objects of the vegetable kingdom, such as every kind of tree and its fruitings, and every kind of young plant and its increases. But for the constant activity of that which is spiritual from the Lord into the primitive forms existing within their seeds they would never start to vegetate and grow in so amazing a manner and sequence. (*Secrets of Heaven* §3648)

When we witness plants grow, from the tiniest blade of grass to the mightiest redwood trees, we are seeing with our own eyes the Lord Himself in the act of creating and sustaining life in this world. Without His constant presence all would be dead and lifeless.

Since the growth of plants is directly from the Lord, it follows that in them we see an image of the Lord. The most prominent perhaps lies in the way that plants have a constant endeavour to reproduce and grow. In this endeavour we see a perfect picture of the Lord's infinity and eternity:

A familiar instance may serve to illustrate the manner in which every thing in nature has respect to infinity and eternity. Any seed, be it the produce of a tree, or of grain, or of a flower, is so created, that it may be multiplied to infinity, and endure to eternity. For from one seed are produced many, five, ten, twenty, a hundred, and from each of these again as many more; such fructification from one seed continuing but for a century, would cover the surface not only of one, but of myriads of earths; the same seeds are so created, that their durations may be eternal. Hence it is evident, how the idea of infinity and eternity is in them; and the like is true in all other cases. (*Last Judgment* §13)

Every little seeds contains within itself eternity. Given the right conditions and care, that one seed could grow to fill thousands of earths. This is not merely a scientific fact, but a reflection of spiritual truth. Just as nature has within itself the potential for eternal growth, the Lord's plan for humanity has within itself eternal spiritual growth. Even after billions of years, even after many billions of people have entered heaven, it will still not be enough for the Lord. He will unceasingly share His love, to eternity, with ever more unique individuals (*Last Judgment* §13).

Now it is true that not every seed does go on to propagate more seeds; some fall on the wrong soil or are choked by weeds or eaten by animals (cf. Matthew 13:1-9). In the same way, not everything from the Lord is received by us and allowed to grow. And yet the Lord, as the Divine Sower, continues to scatter an abundance of seeds on all of humanity, from the best to the worst of us. He does not withhold his love from those who won't receive it any more than a tree withholds its seeds from bad soil. The tree, like the Lord, scatters everywhere possible, trusting that enough will take hold to ensure a next generation arises.

This explosion of potential life does not just reflect the Lord. It also reflects back an image of humanity, and our relationship with the Lord. Jesus compared this relationship to that of a branch to the vine:

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:1-8)

All of our life, all of our love and intelligence and delight and insight comes from the Lord alone. Yet just as a scientific minded person can ignore the life that flows into a plant, it is all too easy for us to ignore that life that flows into us from the Lord. This truth is only visible if we begin from faith and trust in the Lord.

Nor is this simply a vague comparison. The life and growth of a plant perfectly matches the spiritual life and growth of an individual. As the passage from John lays out, just as life from the vine flows into the branches and produces fruit, and those branches are discarded that do not produce fruit, and even those that do must still be pruned, life from the Lord flows into us; if we are willing, we can draw on that life to produce good works; when we refuse that life and do not produce good works, that part of our life is cut off from the Lord and dies; and even in doing good works we need to be pruned of self-righteousness and arrogance, acknowledging that each and every good work comes solely from the Lord through us.

The teachings of the New Church go into even greater detail, explaining how ever part of a tree corresponds to some part of a person's life. We see this applied to the way that a person grows from mere knowledge to producing love and charity:

...every part of the tree - its branches, leaves, flowers, fruits, and seeds - then symbolizes accordant elements in the person.

The branches symbolizes a person's sensory and natural truths;

the leaves his rational truths;

the flowers the first spiritual truths in his rational mind;

the fruits the goods of love and charity;

and seeds the final elements in the person and also the first.

(*Apocalypse Revealed* §936)

So let's walk through this sequence with a practical example. Let's take a person who first studies anatomy. He learns facts and ideas about the human body from books and in classes. These facts are the framework and branches upon which something deeper can grow. Then he starts to think rationally: he contemplates the uses to which facts about anatomy can be put. He synthesizes these facts with other ideas that he knows. This rational thought process is like the leaves of a tree, enabling it to take in life from the sun. But then something beautiful flowers: this is when rational truths become spiritual. In other words, it is when rational ideas are married in thought to some spiritual purpose and goodness. In his case, perhaps his realization of how his academic knowledge can be applied to medical care for others. Perhaps it is when he realizes his purpose is to serve the Lord and care for his neighbour through work in the medical field. This kind of purpose adds beauty to what before was merely logical information. But this is not the end of course: after blossoms the true purpose of the tree comes into being: the fruit. The fruiting is when he actually puts his spiritual wisdom into practice, committing his life to service and use. And just as the fruit contains the seeds for further growth, in putting his wisdom into practice there will be an explosion of new possibilities to repeat the process, rising from facts to wisdom to use once again, in an endless cycle.

These reflections that exist in nature, whether an expression of God's infinity or of a person's life cycle, are not coincidental. It's not that occasionally a tree makes a good analogy for a person, or seeds may, at times, make for a convenient metaphor for faith. Everything in the created universe relies for its very existence on these underlying spiritual truths. When we are surrounded by living, growing plants, we are surrounded by a physical manifestation of God's living, growing love. The Teachings of the New Church go so far as to say,

The universe in its greatest and least elements and in its first and last elements is so full of Divine love and wisdom that it can be said to be Divine love and wisdom in an image. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* §52)

Because this is so, you don't need to know the exact details of what a specific tree represents or stands for. It is enough to simply know that it has life from the Lord, and wonder at the miracle of it. The next time you are in a garden, or contemplate a tree in your yard, or simply pass a field on the roadside, give some thought to how abundant life from the Lord is. Take the time to appreciate what a blessing He has given us in the world of nature. If you want go a little deeper; reflect on what you can learn from a plant or a tree or a flower; consider what message the Lord might be sending through it; see in it a reflection of your own life. And the same is true of the Word: when plants and living things are mentioned in your readings, pause to give

some thought to these same ideas. We'll finish with one such passage, that compares a good life to a strong tree flourishing by a river:

Blessed is the man  
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;  
But his delight is in the law of Jehovah,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.  
He shall be like a tree  
Planted by the rivers of water,  
That brings forth its fruit in its season,  
Whose leaf also shall not wither;  
And whatever he does shall prosper.  
The ungodly are not so,  
But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.  
Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,  
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.  
For Jehovah knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.  
(Psalm 1:1-6)

*Amen.*