

“The Softening of Spring”

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“Light in spring...unlocks and softens the ground...and it melts ice, so that water flows from its sources again. The situation with faith and goodwill is absolutely identical.”

(True Christianity 385)

I hope you are enjoying the beautiful springtime weather! The Writings tell us that the climate of Heaven is like the climate of spring. Not too hot, not too cold. The perfect balance of heat and light. And the reason for that is that Heaven is a state of mind in which we live in a balance of goodness and truth, or love and wisdom. *“The sun [of heaven] produces a constant balance of heat and light, that is, a constant union of good and truth. For heaven is in a state of perpetual spring”* (CL 222.4; see also HH 136, 289; DLW 102, 105; TCR 41.2). The teachings for the New Church tell us that “light” corresponds to truth, and “warmth” corresponds to goodness.

Another thing that corresponds to the truth is “water” (see AC 680). This is because the truth is essential to our spiritual lives, just as water is essential to our natural lives. The truth nourishes us, and refreshes us, just as water does. The truth helps us dissolve and wash away the bad habits and evils in our lives, just as water is used for washing and cleaning. And as we know, water can exist in three different states: solid, liquid, or gas; as well as different forms such as ice, hail, snow, rain, rivers, lakes, oceans, steam, clouds, etc. This is because the truth can also exist in different states and forms.

In wintertime, water often exists in the form of ice. “Ice” corresponds to truth that is lacking the warmth of love. The Writings say that: *“people who have separated faith from goodwill can be compared to mountains of pure ice”* (TCR 385.3; see also 185, 367, 527.3; AC 880, 2027, 3146.2, 7553; HH 132, 482; CL 510; AR 875.16). Truth that is not joined with love has many of the same qualities as ice. It is cold. It is hard. It is rigid. It sometimes has sharp or rough edges. Ice, like the truth, can be beautiful and fascinating. But it can also cause problems. Ice on the roads in wintertime can be dangerous and cause accidents. Similarly, when we use the truth without love in our lives it can be dangerous; we can often end up hurting other people. Ice in the wintertime can sometime prevent us from getting to our jobs or loved ones. Similarly, the truth without love often prevents us from being truly useful or present with other people. Water expands when it freezes, and I’ve sometimes wondered if this represents the way that when our minds are filled with truth without love, it can often lead to a pride of self-intelligence, which is like an expansion of our ego.

But today I want to focus on the *rigidity* of ice, and then the *fluidity* of water when ice melts in the springtime. When water is frozen it conforms to the shape of the container it is in, and because of its rigidity it cannot adapt to fit containers of different shapes. The same thing happens to the truth. If love is not married to the truth, in the way that we use it in our lives, then we can have a tendency to think that the truth only applies to life in one way. We can believe that there is only one way to understand the truth; only one way for it to fit in our minds. We can believe that we need to conform to a singular way of being or living, in order for the truth to fit into our lives. And when seeking answers to various questions or situations, we can sometimes believe that there is only one right way to do things, because our mind is stuck in the rigidity of truth without love.

Rigidity *can* be useful at times. Our human bodies would not be able to function without the rigidity of bones. We would not be able to live in houses without the rigidity of walls. Similarly, our faith in the truth can provide necessary structure in our spiritual lives, as well as the comfort of something to hang on to in the turbulence of life in general. However there are many times when we can be *too* rigid in the ways that we use the Lord's truth in our lives. And that is represented by the rigidity of ice.

In our story from the Word today, King Saul was like ice. "Kings" in the Word, such as Saul, represent the truth (see AC 4763.3; AR 166.3). But in this story Saul represents truth that has been separated from love (see AC 4763, 9409), so much so that he actually represents falsity, which is what truth becomes when it is removed from love (see AE 323:12). When love is removed from truth it is no longer really the truth, just as when King Saul turned away from the Lord, he was no longer really the King; the kingdom was taken from him. And the idea that Saul represents this kind of "truth" is very apparent from the lack of love in Saul's character and behavior. He had disobeyed the Lord's commandments (see 1st Samuel 13, 15). He had made foolish decisions (see 1st Samuel 14). He didn't want to give up the power he had as king. In one instance, his anger led him to kill the priests of Nob (see 1st Samuel 21). He felt jealous of David, and had tried to kill him numerous times (see 1st Samuel 18, 19). As we heard in our opening readings about springtime and winter: "*Faith separated from goodwill kills everything*" (TCR 385). And so at this point in the story, King Saul had all the qualities of ice; he was cold, hard, and dangerous. He was rigidly clinging to his hatred of David. He was unwilling to change, and accept him as the next king.

David as the next anointed king represents truth as well, but it is truth that is joined to love: "*David, signifies in the highest sense, Divine truth proceeding from the Lord's Divine good, and in the internal sense, every truth from good that is from the Lord*" (AE 206.3). The oil used in the anointing of kings symbolized this goodness of love (see AC 9954.15). And the quality of truth joined with love is very apparent in much of David's character and behavior, especially in this story. He showed respect to Saul. He showed mercy and compassion to Saul. David here represents the heavenly quality of innocence, which is the desire to do no harm. He practiced the very difficult form of charity that the Lord later taught when He was in the world: "*Love your enemies*" (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35). And because this is the second time that David spared Saul's life when Saul was trying to kill him, he also showed the quality of forgiveness that the Lord taught about when He said that we should forgive "*seventy times seven*" (Luke 18:21-22). His desire to save Saul's life represents a very different form of truth, as it says in the Writings: "*Divine Truth separated from Divine Good condemns all people, whereas Divine Truth united to Divine Good saves them*" (AC 6148.6; see also 2015.10).

And one of the amazing things about this story is that David's loving behavior towards Saul changed Saul, fairly dramatically! At the end of this story, Saul seemed like a completely different person, almost like he could "hardly be recognized" (AC 1949.2). At the beginning of the story Saul wanted to kill David, and at the end of the story he had softened, and he called David his son and blessed him. This is the dramatic transformation that water can go through as well. With the warmth of springtime weather, H₂O transforms from ice that is cold, hard, and rigid into liquid water that is warm, soft, flexible, and fluid, which allows for the beautiful flowers we see at this time of year. It's the same substance - H₂O - but it looks very different. The transformation of ice to liquid water is something we are all very familiar with, so it may not seem dramatic or surprising, but it represents the dramatic change that the truth can go through in our own lives. The following passage that we heard in the readings describes the dramatic

transformation that Saul went through, as well as the transformation of ice to water in springtime. And most importantly it also describes the softening transformation that *we* can go through as well:

The person whose rational is such as consists in truth alone, even though this is the truth of faith, and does not at the same time consist in the good of charity, is altogether such: They are quick to find fault, make no allowances, are against all, regard everyone as being in error, are instantly prepared to rebuke, to chasten, and to punish, show no pity, do not apply themselves and make no effort to redirect people's thinking; for they view everything from the standpoint of truth, and nothing from the standpoint of good. In short, they are a hard person. **The one thing to soften their hardness is the good of charity**, for good is the soul of truth, and **when good draws near and implants itself in truth the latter becomes so different that it can hardly be recognized.** (Secrets of Heaven 1949.2)

For truth without good is utterly rigid; but when it regards good as the end in view that rigidity starts to change into flexibility. Good on the other hand is in itself flexible, and when it has truth introduced into it that truth too, because it develops into good there, becomes flexible. (Secrets of Heaven 7068)

The flexibility or fluidity of water makes it generally much more useful than ice. When water is liquid it adapts to fit the shape of any container it is poured into. The same thing happens to the truth that is joined with love in our lives. When the truth is liquid or fluid in our thoughts and behaviors, then we can recognize that truth applies to life in many different ways, like water being poured into containers of different shapes and sizes. We recognize that we don't necessarily need to conform to a singular way of being or living in order for the truth to fit into our lives. And when seeking answers to various questions or situations, we can recognize that there is often not only one right way to do things.

For example, we know that one of the 10 commandments is that we should remember the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8). If we hold that truth *without* love, then we might rigidly cling to a belief that there is only one right way of worshipping, but if that truth is joined with love, we're more likely to recognize that people can observe the Sabbath in very different forms, and on different days of the week. We know that it is a truth that we need to repent of our bad habits and behaviors in order to live the life of heaven and charity. If we hold that truth *without* love, we might be inclined to believe that shame and punishment should be involved in that process. But if we hold that truth *with* love, we might be more inclined to recognize that it is often an atmosphere of love and acceptance that creates the safety required for true repentance. Repentance can look very different in different people's lives. We know that it is a truth that God is Human. If we hold that truth *without* love, we might rigidly cling to a singular way of imagining or picturing the humanity of God. But if we hold that truth *with* love, we might be more inclined to recognize the truth that God appears differently to different people, and that How God appears is flexible and fluid. We know that it is a truth that we should love our neighbor as ourselves (see Matthew 22:39). If we hold that truth *without* love we might be inclined to love other people *only* in the way that we would feel loved, which might sometimes make us come across as cold or rigid. But if we hold that truth *with* love, we are more inclined to recognize that the ways we practice charity towards other people needs to be flexible and adapt to their specific needs and loves (see Matthew 25:35-36; AC 2425.3-4, 3419.3). We know

that it is a truth that what brings truly conjugal love into a couple's marriage is the marriage of goodness and truth (see CL 83). If we hold that truth *without* love, we might be inclined to think that the reciprocal, complementary dynamic in a marriage relationship can only look one way. But if we hold that truth *with* love, we might be more inclined to recognize that the marriage of goodness and truth can look very different in different couples' marriages.

When truth is joined to love in our lives, we're more likely to practice the humility that Saul practiced when he said, "I have sinned...I have erred exceedingly" (1st Samuel 26:21). We are also more likely to come into a state of repentance and innocence in which, like Saul, we say "I will harm you no more" (1st Samuel 26:21). And we are more likely to see the good in other people, like Saul saying to David: "May you be blessed... You shall do great things." (1st Samuel 26:25). These are the qualities of truth when it is flexible and fluid, because it is joined with love.

I think it's fascinating that David removed the spear and the jug of water by Saul's head. I think the removal of the spear could represent the fact that truth joined with love stops being a dangerous or harmful form of truth. And I think the removal of the water jug could represent the idea that the truth - symbolized by liquid water in the jug - really belongs with the "David" states in us, rather than the "Saul" states in us. We end up having *more* of an understanding of the truth - more water - when we join the truth with love. This is also symbolized by the fact that as the warmth increases in the springtime, the light also increases.

The softening of the earth in springtime because of the warmth which melts ice into water, is a very useful annual reminder of the spiritual softening we can go through as well. The promise of the return of spring every year reminds us of the promise that we too can live in the springtime state of heaven, in which truth in our minds is joined and balanced with love in our behaviors. As the teachings for the New Church say, "*the form of heaven is utterly fluid and not at all resistant*" (*Secrets of Heaven* 7068). Like water in the springtime.

"When faith is united to goodwill, it is like the light in spring. ... Light in spring, which is a light united to heat, causes trees to grow, first producing leaves, then flowers, and finally fruit; it also unlocks and softens the ground so that it produces grass, plants, flowers, and shrubs; and it melts ice, so that water flows from its sources again. The situation with faith and goodwill is absolutely identical. ... Faith united to goodwill brings everything to life" (*True Christianity* 385).

As David himself said in the Psalms: "*You visit the earth and water it, You greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; You provide their grain, for so You have prepared it. You water its ridges abundantly, You settle its furrows; You make it soft with showers, You bless its growth"* (*Psalm 65:9-10; see also 147:18*).

Amen.

Lessons:

1st Samuel 26

True Christianity 385

Secrets of Heaven 1949.2, 7068