

The Minority Report

"Then Caleb quieted the people...and said, 'Let us go up at once and take possession of the land, for we are well able to overcome it...' But the men who had gone up with him said. 'We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than us.' And they gave the children of Israel an evil report of the land they had spied out."

Numbers 13:30-32

A Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

On this Charter Day weekend, I invite you to consider the place of *courage* in your life.

Courage is a spark from heaven which permits us to face our fears, whether those be physical or spiritual.

Our life *shrinks* or *expands* in proportion to our level of courage...

When we are feeling brave,

we are optimistic, encouraged, hopeful

When we are feeling fearful,

we become pessimistic, discouraged, hopeless.

In this sermon today, we will be exploring the spiritual significance of the two reports given to Moses by the twelve spies after they returned from their forty-day surveillance trip behind enemy lines in the Promised Land.

One of the reports, delivered by the majority, invoked...

a fearful, negative mindset,

...and a shockingly, abrupt dismissal of God's capabilities.

The other report, delivered by the minority, invoked

a courageous, positive mindset:

...full of confidence in God's capabilities.

Courage is a good topic to consider this weekend because we are all, in one way or another, *beneficiaries* of those who had the *courage* to found the *Academy of the New Church*, the educational arm of this church organization.

Without the founding of the Academy, we would have...

no priests
 no teachers
 no schools
 no formal, systematic *means* to educate young minds so that they
 might,
 in adult age,
 and of their own free will,
 receive the Lord in His Second Coming...
 and thereby help establish the Lord's New
 Church on earth.

It took courage to do these things because the founders of the Academy...

dared to be different.

Those who signed the Academy Charter in 1877 knew that their ranks were small, that they were a minority group.

They knew that they, and future generations, would face spiritual persecution from the hells.

They knew that they, and future generations, would face ridicule and belittlement from a secular world that seemed so much stronger and better positioned to be "successful."

They knew that they, and future generations, would face skepticism and cynicism that the experiment would work...

**And yet, here we are, one hundred and forty-seven years later,
 celebrating this noble cause.**

In turning to our story, you can imagine the *tension in the air* as everyone waited to hear the report of the twelve spies. In just a few short months, the Lord, through Moses, had led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt into the freedom of "open land."

The Lord had demonstrated His power and protection to the Israelites in miraculous, dramatic ways...

by parting the Red Sea,
 by feeding the multitudes with manna and quail
 by providing them with clean water in the desert
 by delivering the Ten Commandments at the top of Mount Sinai in
 the midst of lightening, thunder and earthquakes.

And now the Lord had taken them to the threshold of their new home, a land flowing with milk and honey.

What would the spies say?

The two reports were obviously complete opposites, even though the twelve spies had all been staring at the same thing!

One was negative, the other positive.
 One invoked fear, the other invoked courage.
 One recommended turning around and going back to Egypt...
 The other recommended going forward and trusting the Lord...

Looking closer, though, the distinguishing feature between the two reports...
 has to do with *sequence* and with *content*.

In terms of sequence, the negative report given by the ten spies, the majority, came *first*....**(this is a key point to remember)**

Now, if anyone in that audience had been feeling hopeful that *maybe*, just *maybe*, the Israelites could indeed enter Canaan as the Lord had promised, that hope was immediately dashed.

The ten spoke first:

They said, "*We went...and [the land] truly flows with milk and honey...Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong...their cities are fortified and large.. we are not able to go up against these people for they are stronger than us...this is a land that devours its inhabitants, the men are of great stature...we were like grasshoppers in our own sight and in their sight...*" (Numbers 13:32-33).

In our own lives, this is how the *sequence* to our struggles, our trials, unfold. The sequence is twofold:

Evils spirits are always the *first* to make their move. We're taught that evil spirits always attack first, "accusing" and "condemning" us (see AC 1683, 5036:2, 8960, etc.).

This has the effect of completely flooding us, paralyzing us, with fear, as it did the Israelites.

And then there's the question of *content*.

In the majority report of the ten spies, which came first,

there is no mention of the Lord, what He could do, or what He had done.

The ten, the majority, didn't just give a "bad" or "negative" report, the Hebrew word literally means, "evil" - they gave an *evil* report.

Why was it evil? It was evil because they were trying to remove God from the equation, from the decision.

We know this to be the case because when Caleb spoke up and contradicted their report with a positive one,

it says "*they said to one another, 'Let us select a [new] leader, and return to Egypt'*" (Numbers 14:4).

And when Joshua joined Caleb in again contradicting their report with a positive one, it says the people made a move to...

"stone them with stones" (v. 10).

So, what about the minority report, the one given by Caleb and Joshua?
Well, consider first, the meaning of their names:

Caleb's name in Hebrew means...

faithful, whole-hearted, bold, brave, devoted

Joshua's name in Hebrew means...

Yahweh saves, helper, deliverer

In terms of sequence, and what they represent, they had a *bold, powerful* response to what the ten had just said.

Caleb responded with the words of our text:

"Let us go up at once and take possession of the land, for we are well able to overcome it..."

Hadn't Caleb been listening? Hadn't he heard the dire report just given by everyone except him? Wasn't it game over? The majority had spoken.

But then Joshua joins Caleb and together they say this,

"The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land flowing with milk and honey.' Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them" (Numbers 14:7-9).

What a beautiful response - again, it's one that mirrors what the teachings of our church say about the *sequencing* that happens in our own spiritual struggles/battles. **The point is that there are *always* two, distinct parts to our struggles just as there were two reports.**

The hells attack first with a barrage of negative, fearful thoughts and feelings, and then the Lord, by means of His angels, moves in with a Divine response.

And in coming to our defense, angels work to take away our fear for, as one teaching says, "**once fear is removed, hope is at hand**" (AC 2984).

And what about the *content* of the minority report?

Well, it had everything, everything that the angels in heaven bring to our attention when they come to our defense, when they come to remind us that we can indeed be "*strong and of good courage*" when we place our hope and trust in the Lord.

One teaching says, "*the Lord [by means of His angels] keeps us in **hope and trust** which [become] the **forces of combat** by which we resist*" the negative attacks of the hells (see AC 6097).

Now, of course, the story ends with the children of Israel rejecting the report of Caleb and Joshua, and so everyone (except Caleb and Joshua) is destined to spend their remaining years wandering the wilderness never to set foot in the Promised Land.

But the principle still stands - every day we have a choice as to which report we will listen to because this is how temptation works.

Our "default" response, the one we're born with, the one we're inclined to go with, has us caving in, giving into the fears and negative thought patterns that create much of the "chatter" in our head. *In our early days, we don't even hear the response from Caleb and Joshua, the response of the angels.*

This "default" response has us wandering in the wilderness for a symbolic forty years, the point being that we all have "wilderness tasks" (steps of repentance) to do before we're ready for heaven.

But our focus today is on Caleb and Joshua's report because this **represents a new kind of response in us**, a response that *surprises* us at first because we didn't know we had it in us to be brave and courageous in the face of our fears - fears which, in the past, would have paralyzed us!

The Lord is constantly inviting us to take the narrow path, the road less traveled. So many of the Lord's teachings are couched in these terms:

"Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:14).

"Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14).

"The harvest is indeed plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:37)

Spiritually speaking, when we choose the minority report, we will feel as if we're alone, among the few, doing the difficult work. **And we will have our doubts as we learned in one of our lessons today (see AC 2338).**

Swedenborg himself, the revelator, experienced this feeling when he received a letter from his publisher saying only four copies of the first volume of Arcana Coelestia had been sold in the last two months (see SE 4422).

Like Caleb and Joshua, new beginnings can feel scary. When we take a minority position we can feel like "lone voices" in a world that doesn't seem to care or even notice what we have to say.

But is this really true? When the Lord talks about the way being difficult and narrow and that few find it, is He suggesting that this is a **permanent** condition, that it will always be this way?

History has taught us otherwise. The spread of the Writings, especially during Swedenborg's time, was painfully slow and discouraging but today, thanks to the internet and a number of brave souls working in the Lord's vineyard, millions of people now know about the teachings of the New Church. The same is true of the Academy movement which we are celebrating this Charter Day weekend. Those who signed the Academy Charter dared to be different. They, and future generations, knew they were in a minority group. They knew they'd face persecution, setback, discouragement, even ridicule, and yet they had the courage, the conviction, the spirit of Caleb and Joshua, to persevere because of their faith and trust and confidence in the Lord.

Everything starts off small, with a few. Why else would the Lord say, "*the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed?*" Everything good, true, noble, kind and hopeful starts off small like a seed, but over time will blossom and grow until eventually it becomes like a tree, tall, noble, standing strong.

We need courage for a lot of things, don't we?! We need that spark from heaven to help us face our fears because life "shrinks" or "expands" in direct proportion to our level of courage. We need courage,

to say we're sorry
to ask for help
to accept advice
to ask for forgiveness
to face adversity
to face our demons
to go the extra mile
to turn the other cheek
to admit when we're wrong
to smile, to take a deep breath
to not be so hard on ourselves and others...

Let us remember that falsity, the lies of the hells, the negative report of the ten, draws its energy from fear. It's the first thing to make an impression on us. But then comes the Lord's truth, the positive report of Caleb and Joshua, which gains its energy and strength the moment we embrace it.

We will be given this courage when we, like Caleb and Joshua, invoke a positive mindset, a mindset that gives the glory to the Lord, a mindset that still has its doubts but which has also seen what the Lord can do, a mindset that is confident in His redemptive power for, in the words of Joshua,

"If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us...Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land...their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them."

Amen.