

Keeping In A State Of Hope

A Sermon by Rev. Donald L. Rose

It is written in the Psalms,

"Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him" (42:5, 11). And again in the Psalms: "But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more" (71:14).

The Writings speak of "a bright state of hope" (AC 8165). Our lesson this morning says that the angels endeavor to "keep the person in a state of hope" (AC 2338). "If he suffers himself to be cheered by hope, he stands fast in what is affirmative."

A valuable truth about life is that we should live in the present, and many of us consciously try to do that. But this is a sermon about hope. And hope, you may say, has to do with the future. Hope may be related to the future, but it is something you feel in the present. It is a present experience. Yes, try to live in the present, but live with hope.

Hope is both something of the rational mind and something of the heart. The book Divine Providence says that it is reason's delight to contemplate a coming effect not in the present but in the future. And then it is said, "This is the source of what is called hope" (DP 178). We find pleasure in contemplating, anticipating, and thinking of particular things to come. We like to have things we are looking forward to.

Hope as expressed in the psalm is also something that flows in and warms us. It is a heart gift. The Writings speak of three things that come to a person who is praying or has prayed: "hope, consolation, and a certain inward joy" (AC 2535). When we are assaulted by evil spirits, we are told that an answer from the Divine flows in. This scarcely comes to the perception otherwise than as "hope and the resulting comfort" (AC 8159).

The Hebrew word for hope in the Psalm is yachal. In a couple of contexts yachal is rendered "trust." For example, in the book of Job: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (13:5). It is also translated to "wait." "Mine eyes fail while I wait for my God" (69:3). Hope is a waiting with good expectation, like one who in the darkness watches for the

morning, like one who enters a new enterprise or a new year of work with good anticipation. I will hope continually. "My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day long" (Psalm 71:15).

When we speak, we know we should speak in terms of hope. We are asked how a sick friend is doing. "Well, we hope he will soon be feeling better." And if the condition is deteriorating, we hope he will be given strength. And if he dies, we hope that his passing will be understood by us, and of course we hope for his welfare in the world to come. Yes, we hope and hope and hope.

Is this realistic? Is it psychologically sound? Does it square reasonably with the actuality of human life? If the Lord is all-powerful, it is realistic. If the Lord sees and knows and cares, it is realistic. He is all-powerful. He sees and knows all things, and His love is ardent and everlasting. To an extent we know this. "They know that for those who trust in the Divine, all things advance toward a happy state to eternity, and that whatever befalls them in time is still conducive thereto." "They are in the stream of Providence who put their trust in the Divine and attribute all things to Him" (AC 8478).

"Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us according as we hope in Thee" (Psalm 33:22). Why are you cast down? Hope in God. The gift of hope makes life's other gifts sparkle. Hope makes the good things of life enjoyable, and it makes adversities bearable. It makes the disappointments and apparent failures endurable. We have hope. And we note that hope is ranked with the two elements of charity and faith. Now abide these three: "faith, hope and charity" (I Cor. 13:13). Love bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things (v. 7).

The early Christians knew this well. The Christians who first endured in the city of Rome received word from the Apostle saying, "The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? ... I am persuaded that neither ... principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35,38,39).

Perhaps we appreciate hope especially in contrast to its absence. If you don't have any hope, your plight is grievous. It is the state of despair.

Every temptation we experience is attended, the Writings say, with some kind of despair (see AC 1787). It is a diminishing of hope. And in despair, particulars that might otherwise cheer us hold no joy for us. On the other hand, when we have hope it seems to have many particular facets. We have hopes for country, community and family, hopes for the church and hopes for specific uses. We look upon other people, and our love for them has specific hopes. The things they need are present with us when we are praying.

There is something special about our hopes for children, whether our own children or others. Because their life stretches out before them, we look on them with hope. We have hope for their success, overcoming their problems, healing their woes. When children are very young our hopes for them are often much better than their own hopes for themselves.

That helps us appreciate the Lord's view of our hopes. It helps us when we pray that the Lord's will be done rather than our own. For His will for us is better than our own.

In one place the Writings speak of "the hope of becoming an angel" (HH 517:2). What a hope for us of finding a life in which what we do is useful for others and makes a difference for good.

We should all be stirred by the doctrinal knowledge that the Lord's purpose is a heaven from the human race, and that our life is related to that purpose. The elderly who seem to have lost much in terms of worldly hopes should in particular know the benefit of the hope that is from the Lord. It is part of our identity, our destiny.

An angel is not always in an intense state of joy. Swedenborg was given to observe at close hand a whole spectrum of angelic states, states compared to the time of day, morning, noon, and evening. He was allowed to talk to angels when zest for life was at its lowest. And it is remarkable that in that state they spoke about hope. "But they said that they hoped to return soon to their former state, and thus into heaven again, as it were" (HH 160).

We know something similar to this. We converse with each other about our disappointments, and we can do so with a smile. We are even able to say to each other, "I have been very depressed lately. I have been

feeling so low." But we can say even that cheerfully, because we have hope.

There is a beautiful passage in Conjugal Love that says, "When the partners tenderly love each other, they think of their covenant as being eternal and have no thought whatever concerning its end by death; and if they do think of this, they grieve; yet, at the thought of its continuance after death, they are revived by hope" (CL 216). They are revived or strengthened by hope.

The mention of conjugal love may remind us of our wondering on the grand scale about the future of true love in this world. So much comes to our attention that can make us regard the human race in a declining plight. Once an angel spoke of the way the precious gift of conjugal love has declined. But note his final words: "Yet, I am nourished by the hope that this love will be resuscitated by the God of heaven, who is the Lord; for its resuscitation is possible" (CL 78). "I am sustained by the hope that the God of heaven, who is the Lord, will revive this love, because it is possible for it to be revived."

Let us be willing that the Lord shall cheer us with His gift of hope. Remember the phrase "but still, if he suffers himself to be cheered by hope, he stands fast in what is affirmative" (AC 2338). "I will hope continually. And I will praise You yet, more and more." Amen.

Lessons: Psalm 43, 130, Luke 10, AC 2338, 6144, 8165