

The San Francisco Swedenborgian Church
edited transcript of Rev. Rachel Rivers' September 8, 2002 sermon

Begin Again

Scripture Readings: Romans 12:9-21; Revelation 21:1-6

God says, "Behold, I make all things new." What promise there is in these words, and what power! What are some of the things that God makes new? —New energy, new enthusiasm, new patience, new courage, new awe, new gratitude, new understanding, new compassion—just to name a few. God makes *all things* new.

Sometimes we feel separate from the power that makes all things new. This power, which is God, resides deep inside each one of us, yet how easy it is to feel separate from it. It's understandable, as the demands of our daily lives are extraordinary. Just getting up and doing all the things that have to be done each day can feel like quite a challenge.

And yet in this challenge of trying to stay on top of our responsibilities, we often lose connection with our deeper self and with what life is all about. When this happens, it can make us feel overwhelmed, old, depleted, and unhappy. And when we feel like that we tend to look to the future to a time that we will feel good again and we fall in the trap of "once this, then..." *Once this happens, then I will be all right.* "Once I get a job then life will begin." "Once I get married then I'll really feel fulfilled." "Once I get through the diaper stage with my kids, then my life will be good." "Once I get through this difficult day with my partner, then everything will be all right." "Once I retire, then life will be worth living."... We are negating God's power by postponing it. God lives in the present moment. When we relegate the goodness of life to the future, we tend to disengage from the power that makes all things new.

As a child I remember thinking grownups were confusing. For example, I couldn't understand why grownups would get so upset about the weather. They took it so seriously, "Oh I hope it's going to be a nice day." I loved playing outside in the rain, so I truly didn't get what was bothersome to them. Young children are often naturally in touch with the power that makes all things new. As we get older the circumstances of our lives can weigh on us and pull us down—even the weather. As an adult now I understand how this happens. And I especially understand now the necessity of turning to and drawing on that power that resides deep inside each one of us that makes all things new.

So how do we reconnect with this inner power? One way is by following what Paul tells us in the last line of our reading this morning from his letter to the Romans: "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*" The evil that is outside of us can upset us and hurt us, but it cannot overcome us. The only evil that can overcome us is the evil that is *inside* of us. In order for evil inside us to not overcome us, the first step is to become specifically aware of it.

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, falls on this weekend. In Orthodox Judaism Rosh Hashanah is considered not just the first day of a new year, but the first day of creation itself: all things made new! There's a ritual during Rosh Hashanah of going down by a riverside and symbolically casting our sins into the river and letting them go. To cast our sins away, first of course, we need to know what they are.

Swedenborg talks about this need to recognize our sins, or faults, in the first step in the process of regeneration, which is called *repentance*. Repentance has to do with finding what is inside of us that is separating us from the love of God and choosing to begin working on letting it go. What is inside of us that's making life more difficult than it might be? Paul's letter to the Romans gives us a whole list of possibilities: Are we insincere? Do we have a tendency to be overly proud or boastful? Are we letting our afflictions depress us?

Swedenborg says it doesn't do any good to just say, "Oh, I'm a terrible person, I have so many faults"—this general kind of thinking doesn't lead to repentance.

Repentance, the beginning of allowing all things to be made new in us, needs to be specific. Also the idea is not to beat ourselves up or be angry or upset with ourselves because we have faults, as that would be trying to overcome evil with evil, and that just doesn't work.

I invite each one of us to think of one thing, something specific, that we do either in our thoughts or in our actions that makes it more difficult for God's goodness to shine in, one thing inside of yourself that you want made new. Is it self-judgment or judgment of others that you want made into a newfound acceptance? Is it feeling like it's all up to you, that you're alone, that you want made into a newfound sense of connection and belonging? Is it confusion about something in your life that you want made into a newfound clarity? An inability to act that you want made into a newfound resolve?

Let something specific come to mind, and let yourself become aware of it in many of its guises. Notice how it operates in your life. By seeing what gets in the way, we take the first step in freeing ourselves from its power, the first step toward reconnecting with those deep places inside of us where we are truly fed by God's love. Let us take some time now to think....

One thing that I have noticed in myself that gets in the way of the power that makes all things new that I want to work on releasing, is the tendency to rely too much on myself alone. This year I am going to focus more on trusting God. What a difference it can make if we reconnect with that power that resides deep within us that can make all things new.

I will close with a story. An old Shawnee Grandmother is telling her granddaughter about the fight that is going on inside of herself. The fight is between two wolves. One wolf represents anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego. The other is filled with joy, peace, love, hope, generosity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, truth, compassion, and faith in humankind. The granddaughter asks, "Grandmother, which wolf wins?" The grandmother simply replies: "The one I feed."

Let us pray:

God, every moment of every day, you make all things new. Help us to see the ways that we are being that weigh us down, that get in the way of letting in a new vitality. Help us to stop feeding these parts of ourselves. Help us to awaken to your power deep within us, to make all things new. Amen