

Living Eternal Life

A talk given at Fern Lodge May 15, 2011

Thank you for that nice introduction, Sharon.

As Sharon mentioned I have experienced firsthand the healing comfort of Christian Science Nursing and I'm grateful to Fern Lodge, which provides this care with love and dedication.

I found this quote by Helen Keller, the famous humanitarian who was *both* blind and deaf; she described faith as "a vision of Good one cherishes, and the enthusiasm that pushes one to seek its fulfillment - regardless of obstacles."

Aren't we fortunate to have Fern Lodge where a vision of Good is cherished? These dedicated workers unite in spirit, passion and devotion to make it a wonderful place of refuge and healing regardless of obstacles. They are joined in their love for God, a commitment to the cause of Christian Science, and a desire to serve their fellow man - and we thank you!

It seems everyone is spending time and money in an endless search to find ways to be healthy, look like a top model or perform like an Olympic athlete. We've all browsed the internet or listened to a conversation behind us in the grocery store and heard about lotions, drugs, foods and the latest surgical procedures-described in minute detail that promise to help us extend and beautify our lives in matter-their promises are always to keep us all fresh and alive in matter.

Well, for those who are convinced that Life is God and that Life is Love this is an exercise in futility. Putting thought and energy into material solutions never helps us to locate the tree of Life. So today I'll talk about the enduring, permanent, unending, unending, everlasting, abiding nature of life that is God.

I have divided my talk into five parts. First, planting the roots of the tree of Life in the soil of the Bible, secondly we'll make it practical, then do a little pruning, run the race, and finally we'll tackle salvation.

Let's start with the Bible. The idea of *living* eternal Life is something Jesus talked about a couple of thousand years ago. The book of John tells of a day when Jesus traveled all morning and stopped by a well to rest from the hot midday sun. Standing and drawing water at the well was a local Samaritan woman. He struck up a conversation with her by requesting something of her - "could she give him a drink of water?" She was surprised by this request because "...the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." (KJ John 4) Thus began a seminal conversation between the two.

Jesus gently roused the woman by saying "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living waters" (*New American Standard*). Now, it's obvious that Jesus wasn't referring to today's latest energy beverage or a caffeinated, electrolyte-enhanced liquid. No, what he had to offer would quench a deeper thirst. He could give her a truer sense of Life.

This new awareness of the enduring, unending, and abiding nature of Life that the Christ promises results in a paradigm shift in how we see our prospects and ourselves. It breaks a limited sense of things based on matter wide open shows us that we are spiritual - God's beloved child. All the 278 different energy drinks on the market in an 8 ounce 16 ounce or even 2 liter bottle can never provide a taste of Life that is God - the Life that is Love.

Was this meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman just a friendly chat or was it heaven-sent? Did Jesus detect some sort of receptivity in her thought? In the course of their conversation, he pointed out that he knew she had been married five times and was working on the sixth. So, considering, her track record, it is clear that to receive a better understanding of life we don't have to have a perfect past - that's a relief - only a desire to clean up the present with some new information.

Jesus said, "whoso drinketh of this water shall thirst again. But whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (KJ John 4)

What a beautiful image - an infinity pool of Life. This stands in stark contrast to the limited mortal sense of things. All around us we are presented with a picture of life as a march to an untimely end, telling you that the present, which used to be your future, will very soon be your past.

On the other hand, you don't march through eternal life you *express* it. You don't march to it or through it - you *express* it. God, Spirit, is right *now*, supplying all wisdom, power, and strength sufficient for your every need. "In Him you live and move and have your being." (Act 17) This is the life that you are to demonstrate. This is the life that is yours to live.

So the merry-go-round of searches stops with a satisfying drink of Truth. The truth that there is one Life and that Life is Life eternal, and that Life is our Life. There is no such thing as "dying in the Lord" but LIVING. There is no "other life". You are presently spiritual because you are *eternally* spiritual and every step heavenward helps *now*.

Mrs. Eddy has a poem in the beginning of Miscellaneous Writings that goes in part:

If worlds were formed by matter,
 And mankind from the dust;
Till time shall end more timely,
 There's nothing here to trust...

...Nothing have we gained therefrom,
 And nothing have to pray:

...My world has sprung from Spirit...
 In everlasting day;

My world has sprung from Spirit...

All of us are engaged in the greatest of adventures - living eternal Life - practicing the presence of God. We spring from Spirit. We don't have to earn it, deserve it or die to receive it. The more we express Life, the more we realize its presence. This brings us around to the second part of my talk - the practical nature of truth.

About a year ago, a mole that had been located on my neck since childhood, appeared to be growing larger. At first I ignored it or made a halfway attempt to not be afraid. But pretty soon, it had grown so big that it began interfering with the jewelry and clothing that I wore.

This problem brought with it all the fears and predictions that might cross one's mind. "Boy this could lead to something bad" and "people have things like this checked out."

Now, the purpose of Christian Science practice is not to create, fix, construct, repair, change or alter anything. It is to understand that everything real exists now, and is right now forever present, complete and perfect. This is the Truth that removes the shadows of those material predictions, assumptions, and beliefs. Our understanding of God makes the problem impossible.

During this time I had a full plate of responsibilities calling out for my attention and it didn't seem right to put everything on hold, but I knew that I

couldn't keep ignoring the problem. So I prayed. The first idea that came to thought was since I was spiritual it didn't make sense that something material could attach itself to my spiritual identity. It was ridiculous to think that any part of my thought could grow matter. With this in mind, I decided that every time I would catch a glimpse in the mirror or became worried or fearful I would turn to God and see the truth of how I was made. I would remind myself that I was spiritual and created in His image and likeness, and the belief that life is in and of matter was no part of the equation. If it wasn't part of God it wasn't part me. And I could know all this with an "abiding conviction"!

That was it - no long petitions and prayers just simple honest acknowledgements of God's presence and power. A few weeks after I started my thought patrol my husband and I went on a vacation. That first night I remember surrendering every activity including the physical problem to God. I felt all sense of human effort and strain drain away. In a few days the problem mole started to become unattached from its location and two days later it fell off. The mole that had been there since childhood left without leaving a trace or mark. This showed that the problem was only an illusion of mortal mind and had never been part of my true identity. My husband who's a wonderful Christian Scientist saw this whole thing take place and afterward looked at me and said "wow".

If you are facing a challenge and think, "I am going to sit down and really pray about this all afternoon, next week, next month, right after I finish this letter, job, dinner - Well here is a bit of advice Mary Baker Eddy gave to Edward Kimball:

“Just wake up! And see your real self ten minutes, or one minute... God will keep you from falling. You can't go down. He has given His angels charge over you; they (true thoughts) will hold you up, and you cannot dash your foot against a stone. Only let these [angel] thoughts hold sway over you.” (Christian Healer amplified edition p. 393)

An additional note about this healing - I was writing this paper and I had a call from a patient on something totally unrelated. In the course of our conversation I read to her part of the talk that included this healing. The next morning I was surprised to receive the following email from her.

Dear Susan,

I wanted to share a healing that took place yesterday. A small growth appeared on my lower left eyelid several months ago. I would pray about it every time I washed my face and put makeup on. When you read me your paper with the healing of the growth on your neck, the part that stood out to me was "matter cannot attach itself to a spiritual idea." Immediately, I accepted this truth. Last night after washing my face, I noticed the growth was gone! And she added - what additional confidence this gave me.... I was awake for part of the night expressing gratitude and continuing in prayer.“

Christian Science healing is accepting Truth into consciousness and when you do, the need is met. The only thing left is to stand back and watch the glory of God unfold as your experience.

It is our prerogative to have a life that is the experience of beauty instead of ashes, lightness instead of burden, and joy instead of mourning. Mentally free yourself from all the limits of a mortal sense of life and demonstrate your unbreakable connection with your creator, divine Love. God, the great I AM, and man the AM in this perfect equation of Life. You are spiritual right now so there is no need to carry around a material concept of yourself all day. So, unburden yourself.

Speaking of unburdening, I saw this catchy note on a church bulletin board recently:

*Good morning, this is God
I will be handling all your problems today
I will not need your help
So enjoy your day
Love, God.*

So if you feel burdened or seem to have you lost sight of your spiritual selfhood go back to that first chapter in Genesis. Remember you are that man, that woman of God's creating - an individual instance of ageless being. Realize your grandeur.

Which brings us to the next part of our talk - the pruning part.

Your grandeur makes you a spiritual classic not a relic of the past. Just as we trim a tree, we prune the deadwood from thought. This allows us to see more of what's present and makes room for spiritual growth. So lose those hard feelings, contentious opinions, and little resentments that cloud and

obscure your divine view. You will find your sense of heaven increasing in proportion to their removal. Some of these shopworn thoughts have been hanging around so long you may not even realize they are still there.

Here's an example of what I mean. When I was young woman, living in Washington DC, I was invited to a beautiful mansion for a dinner party that a talented acquaintance was throwing. She had just returned from France, having spent a week living at a world-renowned chef's home, in order to acquire the finer points of French cooking. All of us were thrilled to be the first beneficiaries of her new skills. The ten of us were ushered into a large magnificent dining room where we sat down to a gourmet dinner. But, while I was enjoying the meal, I noticed upended and leaning against the wall in the far corner of the room a great big, used mattress. Of course no one wanted to embarrass our hostess, so the mattress in the room was never brought up. Although I never did find out why this old mattress was sharing dinner with us, I do have a theory. This mattress had been there so long, no one saw it any more. The irony is I don't remember one thing I ate that night - but I've never forgotten that mattress!

The mattress is a symbol for me of how you can get so used to seeing or believing something that it just becomes part of the life landscape. An old used mattress in a formal dining room seems like it would be pretty obvious, which leads one to think that it is quite possible that we might have a few mattresses of our own lying around - mental mattresses! Things like old injustices, worn-out opinions, and a few "well, that's how I do it" lying up-ended in a mental corner. So, don't forget - like any old mattress you can drag them out back or take them to the dump. You are

not a haunted house and there is no reason to hang out with these ghosts of the past. Man's future is not in the past and neither is his present, so freshen things up and beautify the landscape!

Mrs. Eddy says in "Retrospection and Introspection" "the human history needs to be revised and the material record expunged." (pg 22). Our human history needs to be revised or in other words, "reconsidered or altered in the light of new information" (online dictionary) and the material record expunged or "erased or removed completely" (online dictionary).

But you do have to be willing - Be willing, be open, be receptive to Truth; expect good all the time. And with a bit of pruning you can liberate yourself from the thoughts that are holding you back or slowing you down.

I did a little pruning myself the other day. A friend said something to me that was unkind and done in an attempt to ease her own pain by inflicting a bit on me. The words hit the mark and I felt the sting. A few days afterward, I was walking my dog and the whole incident flooded back. I found myself reliving the experience and feeling again the sting of those words.

Suddenly it occurred to me, maybe this person wounded me the first time, but who was doing the wounding the second? By reliving the incident wasn't I the one doing the stabbing? Maybe it was time to let the whole thing go. Maybe it was time to redeem this experience through divine Love - remembering if God didn't say it hadn't been said. After this realization the whole experience just left me. Even though the person later made amends it didn't matter - I was already amended.

The history of error cannot root itself in our spiritual identity. You don't need to uproot the past, just don't give it a permanent foothold. And keep at it.

Practicing the presence of God doesn't mean that you will soon become translucent and float through a boring, vapid existence. Which reminds me of on my favorite Farside cartoon. It pictures a man sitting quietly on a floating cloud with his little halo and wings - obviously in heaven - and the caption reads, "Gee I wish I'd brought a book".

We need to get away from the sense that eternal life is floating on a cloud or is some kind of a Disneyland that we will visit in the future.

You don't have to go anywhere to find God. The one God, one Lord, has not split His creation into two camps with a great divide between them. Only so-called material life has a beginning and end, states and stages, and time limits of all kinds: too young, too old, too early, or too late. But, Good, God, is indivisible. It is not divided but *reflected* by all in infinite measure. Each and every day provides us with more opportunities to live and demonstrate an undivided sense of life in God. Ours is a *living* faith.

Nobody can die out of Love - no one has ever died out of God, good. Take yourself off a timeline and express your eternity. We begin with running daily the "race that is set before us." (Hebrews 12)

Which happens to be the next part of my talk: I have a friend, now in his mid 80's, who still runs the San Francisco marathon each year. He has some pretty interesting observations about his undivided sense of God and of Spirit as filling all space. Here are some of his thoughts:

“When I go on a long run I try to keep focused on the truth that myself and each of the other runners and all the trees, houses, cross streets, and other things we pass along the route (being spiritual) are filling all of the same real space, Spirit. We are actually already at the finish line as well as at the starting line and everywhere in-between. All that I and the other runners are actually doing is changing our focus from the things we see at the starting line, step-by-step to what we see along the way, and finally to what we see at the finish line.”

... .The reason that little kids can run with such delight on the playground without practicing or training is that they have not accumulated in their human thought all the little foxes of criticism, resentment, worry, anger, fear, etc. that we adults tend to retain in our unconscious thought or in our active memory. These little glitches interrupt our smooth switching of focus to where we struggle to move our legs as fast as we used to go. To human sense this is the effect of age and of not enough daily training and practice.

But, Jesus didn't have to practice walking on the water. He didn't have to start out walking on top of a mud puddle, then on a calm pond, and finally on a stormy sea. But he did have to practice holding to the truth of what God is already doing and always maintaining - right now.

Our runner continues:

“Sometimes when I come to a large hill, I think, ‘Oh, I will now have to struggle to climb the hill.’ At other times I get lost in my thoughts and then

suddenly realize, “Oh, how wonderful, I just climbed that steep hill without realizing it!”

From Hebrews 12: “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,”

We’ve been talking about running a race, so end let’s end today by discussing the finish line - salvation. The mission of Christian Science is to deliver, liberate, and redeem. We live salvation - we don’t put it off for another time or another place. Here’s an example:

A young man came in to the Reading Room while I was on duty. He was living at a nearby halfway house while he was turning his life around. He asked two questions, “are Christian Scientist’s saved?” and “What do you believe about salvation?”

I had just read the current Christian Science Sentinel (March 2003) which was devoted to the 91st Psalm and contained the testimony of a soldier who had prayed his way out of a life-threatening predicament. I asked the young man if I could read him something to answer his question, and he agreed.

As many of you know, this psalm describes protection from all sorts of things - the fear of the night, pestilence, disease, and accident - and assures us that “God sends his angels to bear us up”

The soldier's testimony describes an incident, which happened during parachute training. Since it was military parachuting, there were no ripcords, just static lines that opened the chutes automatically with men jumping out both sides of the plane. There were very gusty wind conditions that day and this soldier was the last man to go. As he jumped, a gust of wind hit the aircraft and moved it sideways. As a result, instead of being a safe distance away from the fellow who jumped before him, he was positioned 3-4 feet directly above him. Before any adjustment could be made, the parachute of the airman below opened and our soldier went feet first right through his open chute. This collapsed the chute and the two sets of riggings became entangled. Both of them were now hurling towards the ground in a free-fall from 800 feet...going 70 miles an hour.

As our soldier was falling he looked down and saw a khaki colored vehicle with a big red cross on the top racing toward the drop zone where they were going to hit. He said, "for the first time in my life there was absolutely nothing I could humanly do for myself. The words of the 91st Psalm came to me and I remember consciously saying 'All right, God, it's up to you, because there is nothing I can do'...just a complete giving over the situation to God."

At this point in the story I turned to the young man standing next to me in the Reading Room and I said, "When do you think this man is praying for his salvation - before or after he hits the ground?" He looked thoughtful for a moment and answered "before". I said, *this* is the Christian Science idea of salvation. You don't have to die to achieve it - you can have it right now and prove God's presence and power in your life.

Here is how our soldier's story ends:

“I hit the ground, took a bit of a roll, and bounced up about ten feet into the air and landed sprawled all over the place. We had fallen so fast we had beaten the man who had jumped 18 seconds before us - by 10 seconds. Before the guys on the ground could get to me I was on my feet. And the other guy was OK as well. We both got up and walked away - the guys on the ground couldn't believe it. The ambulance crew shook their heads in disbelief.”

With the true idea of God, “all things are possible”.

So what are we waiting for? We can prove every day that we are living eternal Life!