

Olivet New Church

CHATTERBOX

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“Neither do I condemn you”

It’s often said that God is love—and all too often is this idea misunderstood. Sometimes it’s taken to mean that God is nothing but an amorphous feeling. Other times, people claim that God is love, yet they also speak of Him as though He’s capable of turning away from His people or growing cold toward them. But love does not do those things. The Lord eternally and unyieldingly loves every single human being—even as He teaches us, very clearly, what we should and shouldn’t do. Simple as this idea is, it can be hard to grasp.

The title of this article comes from the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:2-11), one of the best-known stories in the Gospels. In this story, the scribes and Pharisees bring to the Lord a woman “caught in adultery, in the very act” (v. 4). And they inform Him, “Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” (v. 5). The whole situation is obviously supposed to be a trap. The Pharisees clearly imagined that the Lord would have no choice but to either reject the law of Moses—and thereby throw away His credibility—or state that the stern sentence should be upheld, thereby making Himself seem less than compassionate in the eyes of the public.

The setup was a mockery of justice to begin with. The Pharisees did indeed know the law—but why were they dragging this woman into the street to be judged in public? Where was the man with whom she had committed adultery? The Lord’s first act was to communicate that He wanted nothing to do with any of it. He “stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear” (v. 6). But when they pressed Him, He turned the situation around by revealing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees: famously, He told them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” (v. 7).

All this is powerful, but what’s perhaps the most powerful part of the story occurs right at the very end. When the crowd was gone and the Lord was alone with this woman, He asked her if anyone had condemned her. When she said no, He told her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (v. 11).

These words sum up the Lord’s entire attitude towards our sins. He does not condemn us. He never condemns us. He has absolutely no interest in condemnation; it doesn’t serve His purpose. He loves us. He wants to make us happy and bring us to heaven. How would condemning us serve these purposes? It’s antithetical to His attitude towards us. The Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church make this point very clearly:

The Lord is as far from cursing or being angry with anyone as the sky is from the earth. Who can believe that the Lord, who is all-knowing and all-powerful, who with wisdom rules the universe, and so who is infinitely superior to all weaknesses, could be angry with such pitiful dust, that is, with human beings? (Arcana Coelestia §1093)

Now, being described as “pitiful dust” isn’t exactly comforting. When we describe something as “pitiful,” usually what we mean by that is that it’s worthy of our contempt. But the whole point of this article is that the Lord is incapable of contempt. We may read contempt into the idea of pity, but it doesn’t have to be there. In this passage, “pitiful” simply means worthy of pity. Someone in a “pitiful” state is someone who needs help. And—at least in comparison with God—all of us desperately need help. How could He not look at us with pity, or with compassion?

And as for us being “dust”—again, we can read a note of contempt into this statement, but it doesn’t have to be there. To say that we’re like dust in regard to the Lord simply means that compared to Him we’re powerless

and really small. Another way to put it is that God is so much bigger than we tend to realize. If we were a speck of dust on the ground, He, by comparison, would be bigger than creation itself.

Imagine an adult being angry with a child, not just scolding or disciplining a child, but actually being angry with that child—rejecting them, treating them with coldness, looking for vindication. We would say that that adult was out of line. The emotional and mental “smallness” of the child, in comparison with the adult, makes that sort of anger especially inappropriate. In comparison with God, we are that child—and in fact we’re so much smaller. We’re a piece of dust on the ground, and He’s greater than the whole starry sky. How could He be angry with us? How could He ever see us as anything but wayward children who need His help—children who need His compassion?

All of these ideas are held within the Lord’s statement that He does not condemn us. Compassion is the very foundation of His relationship with us. He is incapable of coming to us with a critical heart, incapable of turning up His nose at us, incapable of turning away His face with disapproval. And this is true even when we sin. The Lord said that He would not condemn a woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery—and adultery is no small sin. He knows all too well how much pain adultery causes.

He does not want that pain. He has compassion on us even when we make destructive choices, but He also sees (much more clearly than we do) just how much hurt those choices cause. He will not condemn us, but we’re capable of condemning ourselves. And that is not what He wants. So He didn’t only tell this woman caught in adultery that He didn’t condemn her; He also told her, “Go and sin no more.” He didn’t flinch away from calling her sin a sin. That wouldn’t have helped her make a better choice—and so it would not have been loving. He is infinitely wise, and that means He knows what will make us happy and what will not. Being love itself, He’s not content to simply let us make unhappy choices. He’ll allow us to walk an unhappy path if we insist on it. But, because He is love itself, He works eternally and unyieldingly to show us a better way.

To put it very simply: His goal is to save us. His goal is to save us from our sins and lead us to the greatest joy that we can possibly receive. Never—not for the smallest instant—does this cease to be His goal. And anger is incompatible with this goal. To abandon us would be incompatible with this goal. Condemnation is incompatible with this goal. Not for the smallest instant does He waver from this purpose.

[The Lord is] Love itself, to which no other attributes are appropriate than those of pure Love and so of pure Mercy towards the whole human race, that Mercy being such that it wills to save all people, to make them eternally happy, and to impart to them all that is its Own—thus out of pure Mercy and by the mighty power of love to draw towards heaven, that is, towards Itself, all who are willing to follow. (Arcana Coelestia §1735)

—Rev. Jared Buss

From the Pastor

“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” Psalm 24

We are the Lord’s. As a New Church community, we turn to Him at all times and in all circumstances. In these uncertain times, do we need to turn to Him even more?

From my conversations with people, it seems that these uncertain times lead people to reflect on the nature of Divine Providence more than usual. I’m not hearing more people question their trust in the Lord, more their frustration with not having a certainty about when this is going to be over. We know that all things are “of Providence” or “in Providence” even if things are not the Lord’s will.

“Those who trust in the Divine know that all things advance toward a happy state to eternity, and what ever befalls them in time is still conducive toward eternal happiness....Unruffled is their spirit whether or not they obtain the objects of their desire.” AC 8478

This looks good on paper, but it’s pretty hard to remain “unruffled” in our spirit in this pandemic. Although “flattening the curve” seems to be working overall, and we are doing better here in Toronto and Ontario as a whole than in some other places, there are still so many uncertainties. It’s a challenge to “keep calm and carry on.”

Yet, soldier on we must. At this time, we do not know when we will be able to come together and worship in church. Our traditional New Church Day celebrations are on hold. It may be ok according to provincial guidelines to be together outside for a picnic with social distancing, but it still might not be the best thing for us to

undertake. The same does not apply for reopening the Olivet School as well as the usual Olivet School year-end ceremonies and celebrations. At this time, we will assume we will continue through June the way we have been during May, keeping the building closed for both church and school.

This is not the “happy news” I wished I’d be sharing at this point in this shutdown, but it seems the most prudent given our vulnerable populations of young and old, and everyone in between. We hope to have better news next month!

As always, please keep me and Jared apprised of any concerns you have. Let us know of any people whom we can reach out to. We’ve been trying to stay in touch with all of you in various ways, but if there is more you believe we can do, please let us know.

Finally, I want to give a shoutout to all the people who are continuing to serve in their various capacities. The Olivet Board and Pastors’ Council are meeting via Zoom video calls. The Olivet School faculty are doing the same, as well as coming to the building at “safely announced times” to collect materials for their ongoing online classes and projects. Similarly, the Sunday School continues to operate with its volunteers to provide services to the children.

Please look over the offerings we have online with worship services and classes and check the Olivet Facebook page to see upcoming classes and discussion from Olivet and from across the General Church.

We can’t be together physically, but we are with each other in spirit.

May the Lord bless you,
Michael

From the Assistant Pastor

I’m excited to announce that an updated and refreshed version of Olivet’s website will be launching soon! As I write, the developers are tackling the back-end work of replacing the old site with the new one. I will send out an announcement when the new version is live, and I encourage you to take a look at it when that happens. Your feedback will, of course, be welcome.

The biweekly discussion class that I’ve been holding via Zoom on Wednesday evenings has been going strong. I’ve really enjoyed the classes, and the conversations that have come out of them have been great (not to mention that it’s really nice to be able to see people’s faces). If you’d like to join any of these classes, just send me an email at assistant@olivetnewchurch.org.

I hope that all of you have remained healthy. I know that as the pandemic and the lockdown drag on, it gets easier and easier for our patience or our resilience to wear out. Please reach out to me if there’s anything I can do to help. And if not, my love goes out to you all. May the Lord give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.

—Jared Buss

From the Principal’s Office

On May 19, 2020, the province of Ontario announced that schools will be closed for the rest of the 2019/20 school year. As has been our policy throughout the pandemic, we are keeping step with the public school system, as well as heeding the recommendations of our top doctors, and we will be following suit. While we are disappointed that we will be missing that time with the children, we are grateful that we will be able to keep them safe physically. The best interests of our students are, of course, at the forefront of our thoughts and intentions, and we will do our best to ensure that they continue to receive quality learning opportunities during this time and prepare for the coming school year, with all the new requirements that may entail.

We agree with the Minister of Education when he said “over these past weeks, [we have] been inspired by the parents’ and children’s eagerness and flexibility in transitioning toward remote learning. We know that this has not been easy, especially with the profound impact that COVID-19 has had on everyone’s lives and livelihood. The ability to keep our students engaged in their learning journey has been remarkable.” We couldn’t agree more! We know it has

been different for every student and family, and we support whatever that looks like for them. Our foremost priority is the safety and wellbeing of every child and every student, as well as those who nurture and support them.

We invite you to check out our COVID-19 Community Page on the Olivet School website. Not only does it provide additional learning resources and links, it's intended as a spot for inspiration and support as well, to anyone in need. Also, as part of our planning for next year, we'll be welcoming back Naomi Reid, in a slightly different role, assisting in the Grade 4/5 classroom in addition to doing the Aftercare and Broader Horizons program.

We very much look forward to "the next chapter" of this odyssey, which will hopefully, in the not TOO distant future, involve the physical gathering together of dear friends, family, students, and staff!

Brittney Wilson, Laura Braam, Val Younan

Job Opportunity: Part-Time Kindergarten Assistant

Olivet School has a job opening for the part-time position of kindergarten assistant beginning in the 2020-21 school year.

Key responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Assisting the kindergarten teacher with the morning programming, in providing well balanced and organized activities, and promoting the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual development of all kindergarten children.
- Assist in the establishment of and support the adherence to classroom-level rules for behaviour and policies and procedures to maintain order among students.
- On the occasion of the kindergarten teacher's absence, the assistant may be asked to be in charge of the classroom—working with a suitable supply teacher, as well as working an extra hour on these occasions for preparation and cleanup.
- Additional responsibility: Lunchroom supervision of all grades, five days/week, and helping kindergarteners dress for outdoor recess

Key qualifications and educational requirements include but not limited to:

- Energy and enthusiasm for the job
- experience working with young children
- patience
- excellent interpersonal and communication skills with both children and parents/guardians.

Minimum high school diploma required, but Early Childhood Educator designation or courses in child development and growth preferable.

To apply, submit a resume and cover letter to Val Younan at val.younan@olivetnewchurch.org by June 5, 2020. A Police Vulnerable Sector Check will be required.

Bryn Athyn College Master of Arts in Religious Studies: Now available for distance learning!

Are you interested in a deep engagement with a New Church theological framework? Consider taking or auditing a MARS course in the 2020/21 school year. Bryn Athyn College's Master of Arts in Religious Studies (MARS) offers students of Swedenborg's theological writings an in-depth study of the Heavenly Doctrine. The MARS program is now fully set up for distance learning. Auditors are welcome at a reduced cost.

For further information on the program or individual courses offered, please contact Rev. Dr. Thane Glenn at thane.glenn@brynathyn.edu.

2020 Spiritual Vision: Transcending Space and Time June 26–28, 2020

From June 26 to 28, 2020, we are bringing people together from around the world in a virtual community to learn about Swedenborgian spirituality and to worship together. From a keynote address by Rev. Dr. George Dole, “From Here to Peace: The Pandemic and Divine Providence,” to seven mini courses by: the three professors at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies (Dr. Devin Zuber, Dr. Rebecca Kline Esterson, and Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence), author and church planter Rev. Anna Woofenden, Helen Keller historian Rev. Sage Cole, spiritual entrepreneur Rev. Rich Tafel, and writer and theologian Rev. Dr. David Fekete, people will find something to enjoy and feast on. Wonderful worship services, including a special service by teenagers in the Swedenborgian Church Youth League, will help us create community with the heavenly host. All are welcome! Look for more information at www.facebook.com/SwedenborgConvention/, www.swedenborg.org, and in the June 2020 issue of *The Messenger*.

Shalom,
Roslyn Taylor

From the Treasurer

Members and friends of Olivet,

It seems like forever since we've been in this COVID-19 crisis lockdown. We have done our best to keep operations as normal as possible and our ministers, staff, board, members, and friends have had a steep online learning curve to continue to provide and receive programs while our building has been closed.

Our ministers are giving online classes and chapel talks in addition to the regular Sunday Service on YouTube and Facebook. Olivet School and Sunday School are happening through virtual classes on Zoom and Google Classroom. These are all happening due to the dedication of the staff, parents, and children who have taken the time to learn how to access these new learning tools.

The church has managed to keep all staff on the payroll and performing uses for the church and school. Because of this our expenses are keeping steady. Though not immediately critical, our investments did drop for the first quarter, by about 10.5%. Plate revenues have decreased due to people having to stay home.

For those of you who are able, I would like to suggest some alternate way to donate.

1) Cheque: made out to “Olivet Church of the New Jerusalem” and mailed to the church at 279 Burnhamthorpe Rd, Etobicoke ON, M9B 1Z6

2) A bank withdrawal called an EFT: You would need to contact me to set this up. This can happen on a regular monthly basis or whenever you tell me you would like money to be taken out of your account. I set this up around the 25th of each month for the upcoming month. The choices of days for withdrawals are: the 1st, 8th, 15th, or 22nd.

3) Credit card: You would also need to contact me to set this up. This can be done on a monthly basis or I would charge your card whenever you told me to, for the amount you would like.

4) Etransfer: This is done by you from your bank account and sent to: treasurer@olivetnewchurch.org. Depending on the type of account you have, this may cost you a fee.

If you are able and need some information on how to do any of the above please call me at 416-620-9388, and I will assist you in any way that I can.

Keep safe and healthy.
Treasurer

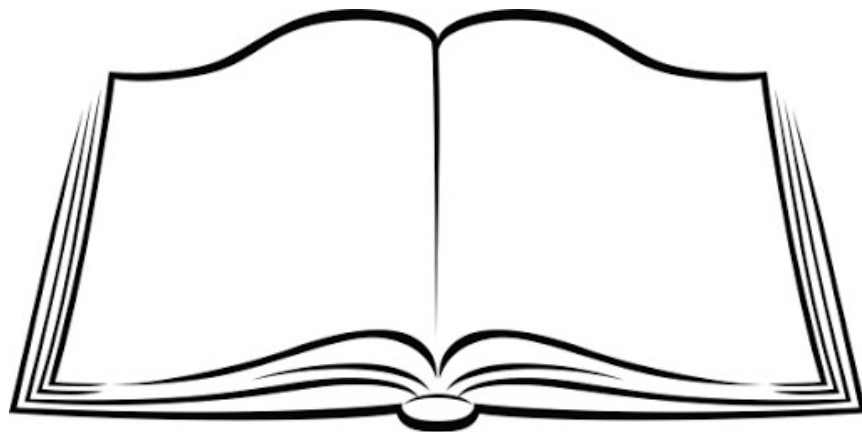
~ Olivet New Church and Olivet School ~
~ June 2020 ~

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 6:30p Beaver Scouts	2	3 8a Online Discussion Class (JJB)	4	5 Last Day Spring Term	6
7 10:30a Worship & Holy Supper (MKC)	8 9a Pastor's council	9	10	11 9:45a Zoom Arcana Class	12	13
14 10:30a Worship (JJB)	15 7p Board Meeting	16	17 8p Online Discussion Class (JJB)	18 Olivet Church Summer Bible Camp (tentative dates)	19 Chatterbox Deadline Olivet Church Summer Bible Camp (tentative dates)	20
21 Father's Day 10:30a Worship, New Church Day Celebration (JJB)	22 Olivet Church Summer Bible Camp (tentative dates) 2a MKC Western trip	23 MKC Western trip Olivet Church Summer Bible Camp (tentative dates)	24 MKC Western trip Moonshine Lake GP&DC - MKC Olivet Church Summer Bible Camp (tentative dates)	25 MKC Western trip Maple Leaf Camp Moonshine Lake GP&DC - MKC Olivet Church Summer Bible Camp (tentative dates)	26 MKC Western trip Maple Leaf Camp Moonshine Lake GP&DC - MKC Olivet Church Summer Bible Camp (tentative dates) Report Cards Mail Out (Spring Term)	27 MKC Western trip Maple Leaf Camp Moonshine Lake GP&DC - MKC
28 MKC Western trip Maple Leaf Camp Moonshine Lake GP&DC - MKC 10:30a Worship (JPC or JJB)	29 MKC Western trip Maple Leaf Camp Moonshine Lake GP&DC - MKC Olivet Church Summer Bible Camp (tentative dates)	30 MKC Western trip Maple Leaf Camp Olivet Church Summer Bible Camp (tentative dates)				

June Anniversaries

Jeremy and Janine Crawford.....June 4, 4 years
(John and) Nancy Wyncoll.....June 10, 59 years
Dean and Virginia Millar.....June 12, 27 years
(Donald and) Ann Barber.....June 15, 57 years

“But successively, as they put off their externals, and enter into their internals, they perceive what had been the quality of their love and inclination for each other, and consequently whether they can live together or not. If they can live together, they remain married partners[.]” *CL 45*



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