

Janet's Speech – ANC Class of 77 – 40th Reunion Dinner – October 20, 2017

Hello friends! I am so happy and grateful to be here today – 40 years after we graduated from the Academy of the New Church in 1977 – the largest, nicest, cleverest, most creative class ever to have gone through the Academy – and the 100th class to go through. So we stand out in many ways.

For those of you who don't know me, I'm Janet Dristy Farrell. Phil Tyler and I were the senior class presidents of this illustrious group! Lucky us!

40 years later we are still a class of doers and I would like to acknowledge and thank the classies who worked so hard to make this reunion possible.

First of all Chara Daum – could you stand up. Thank you for spearheading us, organizing us, writing to us, meeting with us over the past year – you are the brick and mortar of this event.

Other classies who have worked tirelessly on our reunion are Jennifer Allen and Martha Pitcairn – they put together this dinner and Martha is hosting multiple gatherings at her home.

Dave Cooper created our website and has organized our class gift

Keith Hyatt is our treasurer

Gail Neukum is the head of our getcha here fund

Angela Herder created the flowers for our dinner

Gerry Hill was all around take things here and there guy

Jenny Maddock is hosting us at her home tonight

Clara Huntzinger hosted the very first class meeting

Phil Tyler, created our postcard

The Post Card committee got together at my house to personalize them. They are:

(Dorothy Brisco, Rachel David, Bruce Bostock, Mark Zimmer, Gail Neukum, Chara Daum, Bobbie Hitchcock and me)

And finally let's thank Brad Johns for agreeing to be our Master of Ceremonies!

As I look out over your faces, I am reminded that you are my oldest friends. My family moved often when I was young so I have only a few friends from my early childhood. So you guys are the folks that I feel I have known the longest! I am thankful for my time in Bryn Athyn. It gave me a foundation of principles and beliefs that I have relied on ever since 1977. I didn't really know it at the time or appreciate it, but what I learned in Bryn Athyn is a deep part of me today.

What I want to talk to you about this evening is Collateral Beauty, 40 years in the wilderness, how being a Swedenborgian helps me be optimistic – and why the Best is Yet to Come.

First of all - Collateral Beauty – the movie. Has anyone seen it? A quirky little film with great actors, great writing and a poignant plot. It's about a brilliant and upcoming entrepreneur played by Will Smith who has built a technology company from scratch with the help of three close friends who have dedicated their lives to building the company. Will Smith's character tragically loses his 6 year old

daughter and he suffers severe depression and psychosis. The company has lost its visionary and everyone is in danger of losing their jobs unless the company can accept an offer from another company to buy them. So the real story is how his friends, full of guilty and angst, hire actors to play Death, Love and Time in order to prove that control of the company needs to be taken away from Smith. Death is played by Helen Mirren who is wonderful, and funny – at one point she tells a character in the movie to notice the Collateral Beauty in their life even in the midst of tragedy. That's all I'll tell you about the film, but watch it – it is an uplifting movie about life and friendship. I'll talk a little more about personally about Collateral Beauty later.

The next thing I'd like to talk to you about is the number 40. It's pretty obvious that the number 40 symbolizes temptations – especially if you think of Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness for 40 days and nights. But in the old testament, the book of Exodus (and Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) is all about temptation – it's the story of the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness for 40 years being led by the Lord through Moses before the Israelites could inherit the promised land. It's a great story and on a certain level is the story of our lives – the Children of Israel are US wandering in the wilderness of our lives. You know the Bible is written for all mankind and the angels – it links us to heaven and heaven with us, so it's worth taking time to read. In case you don't remember the dramatic story, I'm going to give you the highlights of Exodus in 5 minutes.

Joseph had brought all his brothers and his father Jacob to Egypt to escape famine and they were honored guests in Egypt because Joseph was loved by Pharaoh. But some 400 years later the children of Israel had grown into a large nation and the Pharaoh of that time was afraid that the children of Israel would revolt and overpower the Egyptians, so he enslaved them. Had their male children killed and forced the Israelites to build the cities of Egypt. It is said that they "groaned under their burden". So God provided them with a great leader, Moses, saved from death by his clever mother who put him in a little ark and floated him past Pharaoh's daughter as she bathed in the Nile. She took pity on the beautiful baby and decided to raise him as a prince in Pharaoh's household. Many years later, when Moses was a man, he sees the injustice done by the Egyptians to his people and he kills an Egyptian who is harassing a Hebrew slave and then feels like he must flee from Egypt. He lives in Midian – a quiet life as a shepherd until God calls to him from the Burning Bush to go back to Egypt to free his people. He does not willingly accept his lot, but argues and pleads with God that he isn't a good speaker, he isn't influential enough, all manner of excuses until God agrees to let his older brother Aaron go as his spokesman – God would talk to Moses, and Aaron would talk to Pharaoh...and be there for moral support. Moses then goes back to Egypt and over the course of time asks Pharaoh 10 times to let his people go. Only after the 10th and most horrible plague where all the firstborn children in the Egyptian's households are killed – while the children of Israel are spared because of the protection from the very first Passover, does Pharaoh relent and let Moses take the entire nation and leave – 600,000 men alone, not counting women and children!

In the wilderness the Lord provides guidance in a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night. He gets the Israelites across the red sea, he feeds them in the desert with quail and manna, he provides water from a rock when they are thirsty and during all of it, the children of Israel whine and complain and often fall into worshipping idols and other gods. Even after giving them the 10 commandments in a spectacularly fiery and dramatic display on Mt. Horeb!

I only bring this up because the story of the children of Israel is really our story. WE are the children of Israel struggling in the wilderness, sometimes listening to God, sometimes ignoring him. We left High School 40 years ago as children in 1977 and over the past 40 years have made our major life decisions – to go to college, to travel, to enter relationships and to end relationships, to get married, to raise families, we've built careers, and changed careers, jobs have come and gone, some good, some not so good, we've lost friends, we've lost parents, we've lost children, we've had triumphs and tragedy, we've seen the world, we've experienced sadness and happiness. We in this room express a whole range of experiences.

We may think that we have been going it alone, but of course, the Writings tell us that especially in times of temptations and troubles, the Lord is fighting for us – working to heal us – to have us become more internal, spiritual people – people who are more like the image and likeness of God – how we are intended to be.

AC 5202[4] The person with whom good is present is undergoing rebirth every moment from earliest childhood to the final stage of his life in the world, and after that forever. This is happening to him [US] not only interiorly but also exteriorly, and this rebirth involves processes that ARE AMAZING. They are processes which for the most part constitute angelic wisdom, and that wisdom is indescribable, embracing such things as the ear has not heard, nor eye seen, or such as have never entered man's thought.

The secular poem, "Footprints in the Sand" puts it another way. God says, "My precious, precious child. I love you and would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you only see one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

So here we are, 40 years later, older, wiser, and at another crossroads in our lives. Our children are mostly grown up, some of us have grandchildren, careers may be winding down, retirement is not something decades away, and I for one am wondering what the future will hold.

Being diagnosed with breast cancer two years ago has changed my whole focus. It's not all been bad and I'm constantly reminded of the collateral beauty that has happened in my life as a result of my diagnosis. In my case, the love and support of my husband, the kindness and care of my family and neighbors and friends. I have found that now EVERYONE tells me that they love me. I call everyone honey and tell them I love them back. I get flowers and food and cards and phone calls from people I wouldn't expect. Friends send me beautiful homemade blankets, or make bone broth and deliver it even though they live 3 hours away. A nurse put me on the Cherokee Nation Prayer list. I've had to put trust in God – to trust that he will lead me to make the right choices. I've had to trust my doctors and to allow them to use their gifts to work to heal me – not easy for a gal who never took any medicine until 2015.

The effect for me of all this uncertainty has been a gentle prodding to explore the directive:

Be Still and Know that I am God.

I wonder if this isn't truly the next phase for all of us. I know most of you are still in good health and full of vitality, but over the next decades we will all be faced with aging bodies and infirmities of one type or another.

Slowing down isn't a bad thing, in fact, I think slowing down would heal many of our modern maladies, perhaps even cancer.

And slowing down might even be a balm for the world. There is so much strife in the world – politics especially these days – that I get anxious if I think about it too much. But my favorite paragraph in the Writings speaks to the differences of opinions that we all hold and what would happen if we let go of our need to be right.

This passage is speaking about the different churches but I think it could be expanded to include all of us humans who hold different ideas about God, about politics, about lifestyle and the best way to live our lives and serve our community.

AC 1799[4] In the Christian World it is their doctrine that cause churches to be distinct and separate and because of these they call themselves Roman Catholic, Lutherans, Calvinists or the Reformed, and Evangelicals, among other names. It is solely by reason of their doctrines that they are called by these names. The situation would never exist if they were to make love to the Lord and charity to the neighbor the chief thing of faith. In this case their doctrinal differences would be no more than shades of opinion concerning the mysteries of faith which truly Christian people would leave to individual conscience and in their hearts would say that a person is truly Christian when he lives as a Christian, that is, as the Lord teaches. If this were so all the different Churches would become one, and all the disagreements which stem from doctrine alone would disappear. Indeed the hatred one man holds against another would be dispelled in an instant, and the Lord's kingdom on earth would come.

So I am optimistic because I see this happening in the world. I think there is a spiritual awakening taking place in our country and, hopefully around the globe. People seeking to be more mindful – practicing yoga and meditation, seeking to be more centered – there is a coming together of Eastern and Western thought at places like Kripalu Center in Western Massachusetts and the Omega Institute in Upstate New York – and even in my little town of Sturbridge – everyone is doing yoga.

And many people believe sincerely in the power of prayer.

I've discovered that the Christian Science Church has a lot in common with the New Church. And each week I look forward to reading the back cover of the CSM which has a short essay titled "A Christian Science Perspective". The October 9th essay was so pertinent and healing given the angry political environment, that I want to read it to you

A Balm for Today (see clip on next page)

A balm for today

Overheated! That seems to describe the temperature of today's mental climate. The political atmosphere in so many places worldwide fairly sizzles with inflaming rhetoric, accusations, and polarized stands. At its most extreme, this polarization results in violence. And on a smaller scale even families and friends often find themselves sharply divided.

I've been thrown around by my own reactions, and I recently realized that it was important for me to stop flaring up with righteous indignation over whatever the latest headlines were blaring. My reactions were keeping me constantly agitated – and not solving anything. *How to stop reacting and temper my thinking* was the question.

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

Throughout my life, it's become natural for me to turn to prayer to deal with challenges. This was not an easy situation considering how readily the angry feelings seemed to grab hold whenever I read the news. But as I prayed for guidance, I came across a very helpful passage in the writings of Monitor founder Mary Baker Eddy. Using Love as a name for God, it reads: "Be temperate in thought, word, and deed. Meekness and temperance are jewels of Love, set in wisdom" ("Retrospection and Introspection," p. 79).

It felt like a cool balm poured through my feverish thinking. I saw that I could do more than simply will myself to stop reacting. I could let divine Love, God, govern my thoughts and feelings. Since we are God's creation, the phrase "jewels of Love" helped me realize that temperance, or a mental calmness, isn't just some state-of mind we have to conjure up, but it is a quality that is naturally built into our true nature as the spiritual offspring of divine Love. We are divinely empowered to express it.

This peacefulness may sometimes seem absent as we get pulled and pushed by the currents of thought that seem to boil around us. But as Mrs. Eddy also says, "Know, then, that you possess sovereign power to think and act rightly, and that nothing can dispossess you of this heritage and trespass on Love" ("Pulpit and Press," p. 3). That nails it! We can do it. Divine Love gives us the ability to do it. As we acknowledge God, good, as our creator, we are able to more consistently experience and express the peace that is inherently ours.

Since praying in this way, I've noticed that temperance, peace, and calm have had a clearer, more consistent presence in my thinking. I've also come to see that temperance is powerful because it allows divinely inspired solutions to emerge where at first we saw only anger.

We can all participate in healing the overheated mental atmosphere by starting with our own thinking. It takes a little practice, but as we see how prayer has an impact in our own lives and relationships, we gain in our trust that it can have an effect more broadly, too!

– Deborah Huebsch

So this is why I am optimistic. The truth is out there – the truth will make us free – and the Lord is constantly working on our behalf.

I propose that we all stick together over the coming decades – that we slow down a little – spend more time on our spiritual selves and share what we know and love with one another.

For me, this is some of what I know:

God is Good

We are created in God's Image

The Bible and the Writings are a link for us to heaven, so we are doing mankind AND the angels AND ourselves a service when we take the time to humbly read them.

Remember the collateral beauty in life.

The Lord forgives us – immediately and over and over again.

Trust that especially in times of temptation and trouble – God is healing us in mysterious and amazing ways

God has a plan for each of us and it is all GOOD

And because we are all precious eternal spiritual beings on a very short human journey, we know that, no matter the immediate circumstances, in the long run

THE BEST IS YEST TO COME