

COLLEGE CHAPEL TALK

SMALL THINGS

by Rev. Walter E. Orthwein

Readings: 2 Kings 5:10-14; *Arcana Coelestia* 215

Which of these boxes would you choose? (one large, one small)

You might well say the smaller one, on the theory that “good things come in small packages.” It is true, we can’t judge the worth of something by its size. A wedding or engagement ring is small, but those wearing one may well consider it the most valuable thing they possess because of what it represents. Your eye is much smaller than your foot, but if you had to lose one or the other, you’d choose the foot. The eye is small, but its use is precious.

The Lord spoke of small things. He said those who are faithful in small things, are faithful in the great ones, also (Luke 16:10). He compared faith to a grain of mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, but with the potential of growing into a large tree. From a worldly point of view, faith does seem small and unimportant; but there is no other power with such potential to affect human lives. (By “faith,” we mean as it is defined in the Writings, the “eye of love,” the form of good, the light of truth).

Small things can be very important in a negative way, too. The Writings note that a speck of dust in the eye can blot out the whole universe and everything in it (*Arcana Coelestia* 215). This is how it is with a false idea, such as the one that says we can’t keep the commandments and that they were put in the Bible just as a test to prove to us that we couldn’t keep them and can only be saved by “faith alone.” Many people believe that! That “speck of dust” is in their mental eye, and blots out a whole universe of teaching in which the Lord tells us most clearly and emphatically that the way to be saved is to keep the commandments. Keeping the commandments may seem unimportant, but it works!

In Psalm 137 Israel is encouraged to destroy the little ones of Babylon. It’s a horrible idea in the literal sense, but it represents getting rid of the evil that Babylon represents—the love of dominion, the strongest evil love—while it is small and before it grows up and becomes too powerful.

Remember the story of Naaman the leper in the Old Testament, how the prophet Elisha told him he could be cured of his leprosy if he would bathe in the Jordan river seven times. It seemed too small a thing to him. “We’ve got better rivers here in Damascus!” he said. But he was persuaded to do it, and was healed (2 Kings 5:10-14).

We may sometimes feel that we must do some great thing; and it is difficult for us to appreciate the value of small gestures. But the Lord said that those who are faithful in the least things are

faithful in the great ones (Luke 16.10). You don't have to be a saint or a martyr to demonstrate faith in the Lord—just keep the commandments, shun the many little evils that present themselves each day, be faithful in the little things.

If a prophet came along today and said the New Church would cease to exist in 50 years unless 100 people volunteered to make a tremendous sacrifice—give half their wealth to the church, or even risk their lives—there would probably be more than enough volunteers. There are many New Church people who would lay down their lives for the church, if that were necessary for some reason. But if asked just to go to church on Sunday, and attend doctrinal classes—which is what the church actually needs—many find that too insignificant a demand, too small a thing

Life generally is made up of countless small moments. Universals are made up of particulars. Divine providence is universal, the Writings say, because it is in particulars. If we are led by the Lord in little things, we will be led by Him in the general course of life to heaven. “The very hairs of your head are all numbered,” the Lord said.

It is worthwhile for us to think of the value of small things, because we belong to a small church. We look forward to it growing. But when we look at the history of the Christian Church, we see that growth is not necessarily an unmixed blessing! When the emperor Constantine was converted, and it became politically expedient for people to identify themselves as Christians, the church grew greatly. It conquered the world, or much of it; but in the process it lost its own soul.

The New Church is small; but it is far from insignificant! It possesses the pearl of great price, worth seeking above all else—that is, knowledge of the Lord. Pearls are small. They grow very slowly. But they are precious and beautiful no matter what their size.

The real question is how large is the New Church in *our* lives? Like many other small things, it can be the most important thing of all. AMEN.