

Swedenborgian Sunday School Notes for the Revised Common Lectionary

John 11:1–45 • Jesus Raises Lazarus from Death

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John 11:1–45. . . Jesus raises Lazarus from death
Ezekiel 37:1–14 The valley of dry bones

Overview

Jesus' raising of Lazarus after he had been dead for four days was the most dramatic and powerful of his miracles—besides his own resurrection and glorification. Today we have an opportunity to talk to the children both about our church's beautiful teachings on the afterlife *and* about how we are resurrected spiritually right here on earth every time we let our bad habits die and begin a new, more loving life.

Key Points

- The Lord is the source of all life, both physical and spiritual, and has power over death.
- We are born to live forever. Our life on earth is meant to prepare us for life in heaven.
- We need to let old, unkind parts of ourselves die so that we can begin a new, more loving life.

Example for Teaching Children

Next week is Palm Sunday, and then comes Easter. On Palm Sunday the Lord entered Jerusalem with a huge, happy crowd all around him. Do you know what happened between Palm Sunday and Easter? *(Pause)* Can you tell us a little about it? *(Pause)*

The people who were in power at that time did a terrible thing to Jesus: they killed him by nailing him to a cross. But the Lord was stronger than death, and rose again on Easter Sunday. Today's Bible story helps us get ready for the Lord's death and "resurrection"—which means rising again from death.

Sometimes doctors can revive people right after they die. But Lazarus had already been dead for four days when Jesus brought him back to life. Why do you think the Lord could do that? *(Pause)*

Just before he raised Lazarus from death, Jesus said, "I am resurrection and I am life. Everyone who believes in me will live even though they die." A lot of people think that everything ends at death. But Jesus teaches us that we will live forever. Even after our body dies, our spirit keeps on living.

What do you think our spirit is like? *(Pause)* Is it just a wisp of air? Or is it a real person? *(Pause)* Our church has some very beautiful teachings about what our life is like after we die, and what it is like to be an angel. The Swedenborgian Church is named for

Emanuel Swedenborg, who spent almost thirty years in the spiritual world. He wrote a book called *Heaven and Hell* to tell us what it is like there.

Swedenborg tells us that after we die, we keep living as a person, with thoughts and feelings, and a spiritual body that is a lot like the body we have here on earth. We keep on doing all the things we like to do here: we work and play, eat and sleep, play sports and music. We are married to the person we love the most. We live in houses, and there are gardens, trees, fields, and mountains. Everything is just like it is on earth, but much more beautiful and happy!

Now what if you were the sort of person who liked to lie and steal and cheat and hurt other people? Do you think you'd be happy in heaven? *(Pause)* You wouldn't! Because everyone in heaven loves each other, and you can't do mean things in heaven.

So there is a deeper lesson in Lazarus's death and resurrection: If we want to have a happy life in heaven, we need to let the bad parts of ourselves die—things like getting mad at people and being jealous. When we do this, we can start a new, more loving life as we learn to love being kind and helpful to others.

Basic Correspondences

death = spiritual death, or damnation

death = resurrection to spiritual life

resurrection = new life in the Lord

Lazarus = a spiritual desire for truth

Thoughts from Swedenborg

"Death" means spiritual death, or damnation—and also resurrection into life, which is salvation. . . . We can see that death means resurrection to eternal life from Jesus' words in John 11:25, 26. "I am the resurrection and the life" means that resurrection and life come from the Lord, and from no one else.

Apocalypse Explained #899b.5

If we are to rise again, we must die both as to our body and as to our ego—which, left to itself, is hellish. Unless both of these die, we do not have heavenly life. *Apocalypse Explained #899c.13*

Lazarus stands for all people that the Lord loves because they long for truth from a spiritual desire.

Apocalypse Explained #137.2