

The Strength and Weakness of God's Love



When watching the sea, we can observe something of the power of nature. A wave will surge forward with great strength and then pull back in response to another force. We know that waves are caused by the wind, moon and sun, and how they can destroy beaches, erode shorelines and undermine houses built close to the sea. This same power of waves can be harnessed to produce electricity and used by surfboard riders to give them an exhilarating experience. If we work with the power of the sea, it can assist us.

The sea also nurtures the lives of fish, coral and other beings that live in its waters. When the sea is relatively calm, it can gently support us floating on its surface. In some places land waste is washed into the sea polluting the water and killing marine life. The sea is both weak and strong.

When Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:10 declares that, “when I am weak, then I am strong”, what is he saying? Does he just mean that when his body is

sick, God's strength is more visible in his actions, or something more? In the power of God's love as revealed in the life of Jesus, weakness and strength mysteriously seem to merge.

At Christmas we are shown something of the power of God's love in Jesus entering our world as a weak and vulnerable baby—someone no one fears, who needs the care of parents to stay alive, grow physically, and be taught how to live.

During Jesus' ministry, he was often confronted by difficult questions that could have ended up in bitter disputes and violence. Instead of answering with a direct statement, Jesus would sometimes tell a parable that needed the hearers to search for the truth it contained, a truth that they were then challenged to live out.

Jesus' words freed some people from oppression and guilt, but in others they stirred up hatred and at times created enemies.

When Jesus performed acts of healing, the power of his compassionate love was shown in the lives of those who were formerly blind, lepers, paralysed, inhabited by unclean spirits, needing forgiveness or even dead.

At the time of Jesus' capture and crucifixion, both his weakness and strength were present, directed by his love. Jesus could have avoided capture by not visiting Jerusalem, or hiding in the darkness instead of walking to the garden of Gethsemane, but in obedience to God and out of love for the world, he did not.

Jesus' words to Pilate, and when being nailed to the cross revealed the power of his love in physical weakness and his control of situations. His response to the thief dying beside him on a cross, assuring him that "today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43), sounds fanciful without a belief in the power of God's love. Finally God's powerful love was shown in an earthquake, the open tomb and, amazingly, the raising of Jesus' dead body to eternal life.

God's love was also visible in the gentle caring acts of the risen Jesus. There was no declaration of war against Rome, or the killing of the high

priest and his close supporters. Instead, the risen Jesus appeared in the Upper Room inviting Thomas to touch his wounds, on the beach cooking fish for his friends and walking along the shore with Peter in an act of reconciliation and forgiveness. Later Jesus commanded his followers to go and make disciples, baptising them and teaching them about God's love. They would be accompanied and guided on their mission by the presence of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

As followers of Jesus today, we are called to witness, in our daily dying and rising to new life in Christ, to the love of God in its weakness and strength. When we are confronted by evil such as the cyber bullying of young people, any anonymous or other bullying, abuse, domestic violence and addiction to drugs, alcohol, gambling etc., we can draw on the power of God's love that strengthens, heals and liberates. We may need to start by recognizing our weakness, and then seeking God's help through others.

To place one's body between a husband and wife who are physical fighting, as a friend of mine once did out of love for the couple, is a risky but non-violent act opposing domestic violence. Fortunately there are other possible responses!

God's love is also expressed when we respectfully sit beside victims or perpetrators, listening to them and sharing in their pain and grievances. In this way people who are angry and feeling destructive can become calm and reasonable, and those depressed be supported and encouraged.

In our lives, does God's love frighten us, comfort us or challenge us? Can we trust in God's love to protect and free us from any power that binds us and prevents us from being the loved person God created us to be? Let us pray that God's love, in its weakness and strength, may be revealed in us and through us, to others.

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