

## **What to Do With Our Embarrassment**

**“Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power...” Words from St. Paul, writing to the Christians in Ephesus. For “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against...the cosmic powers of this present darkness...” Do his words sound strange to us today?**

**Such words can sound glib or foolish in the face of great onslaughts or tragedies. To some they may sound fearful, maybe aggressive. These words might even seem embarrassing to the learned and sophisticated. In our postmodern, multicultural, technologically sophisticated society this kind of talk may raise eyebrows of skepticism if not outright mockery.**

**Our faith in Christ Jesus, Son of God, Savior from our sinful condition, runs against the grain of human nature and human societies. That is why we need to be here every Sunday to again take hold of the truth that is so often ignored in other areas of our living; even as we are assailed by falsehoods and rival claims of truth. Genuine Christians will find themselves challenged by the those who misunderstand us and those who oppose us.**

**The earliest Christians were sometimes accused of being cannibals! It was said that they engaged in a worship that included eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ! Sounds terrible - so rumors spread. From the beginning, even while Jesus was on this earth, there were those who didn't understand. Those who heard him speak about himself giving his blood and flesh for them, asked, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (Jn 6:52). Some were offended. Some became angry. Some followers left. Even his own disciples said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (Jn 6:60). Were they embarrassed by his claims?**

**Sometime ago there was a newspaper article about the emerging wine industry in the southern U.S. It seems a local grape grower had applied to the City Council for a permit for his winery and bottling plant, and he was getting a lot of opposition from Baptists and Methodists who objected to alcoholic beverages being produced in their town. One councilman, referring to the time Jesus turned water into wine, said, "I don't understand why he did that. It has always been an embarrassment to me."**

**Does he embarrass you? Jesus makes extraordinary claims about himself: that he is the bread of life, the way, the truth and the life; that he is from God, and that by the cross he will be lifted up and draw all people to himself; that returned to God. Does he sound too exclusive, or preposterous, or too demanding? Don't we often try, in subtle and not so subtle ways, to make him over into our own image, so he will fit with our crowd and not embarrass us?**

**That is why Jesus asks us to make a decision about who he really is. It is a matter of life and death. Is he or is he not the one sent from the “living Father?” If not, he is a fool and so are we. But if he is, then here’s our chance to join with God and receive eternal life.**

**There are so many distractions in our lives - that pull us away from Him, that pull us away from truth. Not the least are burdens we carry, the struggles in our own personal lives. Some of us worry about raising our children - can we provide a good education for them? can we provide opportunities for their growth to maturity? can we equip them to face this challenging and complex world? can we teach them to know Jesus? Others are concerned about where their next paycheck will come from. Can I find employment in economy? can we continue to meet our financial obligations, keep our medical insurance, make house payments? will we have to move out of the area?**

**Still others must focus on their health; in many cases, declining health. There are the questions of medical appointments, medications, of course. But the bigger questions loom: will I get better again? how can I adjust to living with a malady? who will take care of me when I cannot care for myself? how much longer will I live?**

**In all these circumstances Jesus offers us himself, while many around us may doubt his strength or mock our faith. You see, many of the challenges of life are spiritual challenges. Standing strong in the Lord, makes it possible to stand strong in the day of trouble. St. Paul’s words still ring true for us today: “...take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having every thing, to stand firm.”**

**Armor was very well known to whom Paul. The Roman army was everywhere. He recognized that so much of what they carried and wore was for protection from their enemies and enabled them to stand together in the face of attack. It's noteworthy that when Paul discusses the Christian's armor, he doesn't talk about the first-century equivalent of a machine gun -- instead he uses the imagery of a shield to describe faith. The shield is a defensive rather than an offensive weapon that protects one by deflecting evil rather than vaporizing it. Similarly, the power that God provides to us is not destructive, but protective -- the power of faithfulness, restraint, and redemption.**

**To prepare us for the battles of life Paul urges us to “...fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Being clothed in this manner we are prepared to handle the struggles, the attacks, and the tragedies that can assail us. .. Tonga ferry... Without that armor of God such an event can bring many to despair. While in Tonga I heard some say it was God’s will. I say no,**

**not at all. The tragedy was of human making. But God may be able to redeem even this terrible event. Remember, God brought redemption for the entire world through Jesus' death on the cross.**

**When life's challenges seem like unscalable mountains, when hope for the future seems dim, Jesus speaks these words, "Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me." He is the wall on which we can lean our ladders. He is the rain that breaks a drought. He is the cool breeze in hot, arid places. He is our strength to carry on when burdens are heavy. He is the One to whom we commend our loved ones when mortal life shall fail.**

**Yes, we can sometimes be embarrassed by Him. He simply will not be made into our own image, or the image of our culture. The truth is, it would be better to let *him* make us into the image of God. Christ, you see, is the One who offers eternal life; our culture does not, our political parties do not, our technology does not, we do not.**

**Each Christian yearns for inner resources that keep faith alive and give hope. Preachers can't give it. Bishops can't give it. Even churches don't really give it. They are but vessels to carry that which is essential. Spiritual armor comes from our great Captain himself...Jesus.**

**The source for satisfying the deep yearning for spiritual truth and strength is found in Peter's response to Jesus' question to him, "Do you wish also to go away?"**

**Peter responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68).**