

"GOD COMES IN AN UNEXPECTED WAY"

TEXT: "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,
but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling
block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to
those who are called, both Jews and Greeks,
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"
(I Corinthians 1: 24-25)

INTRODUCTION At the time of the birth of Jesus, the Jews were a disheartened people. Their little country had been a corridor between the two great powers of Egypt on the south and Assyria on the north. Armies had marched through their country century after century, and they were the pawn, tossed first to one power and then to another - and then to Persia, then to Greece, and now to Rome.

At the time of the birth of Jesus, His people, the Jews, were condemned by Rome to an inferior status in their own Palestinian homeland. For the most part, with few exceptions, they were not recognized citizens of the state of Rome. They were not privileged to the normal and quiet security that comes about as a result of protection by the state, so that if Jesus were pushed into a ditch by a Roman, He would be just another Jew in a ditch, without any recourse whatsoever.

At the time of the birth of Jesus, the world was at peace. For forty-four years Augustus Caesar, the Emperor of Rome, had managed to maintain a world where there was no declaration of war. Peace prevailed, at least on the surface of things, but underneath were the rumblings and discontent that are always there when a people is forced to accept what everyone knows is unjust, inhuman, cruel and evil. In the Roman Empire at that time the slaves outnumbered the citizens.

DEVELOPMENT With this background, it comes then, as no surprise, that the Jews of that time, and before, had been looking to the dawning of a better day. They were looking for a Messiah, a Vindicator, a Deliverer; one to whom they could point as the Anointed One sent by God to set them free. They were looking for a leader to break in upon the pagan Romans and obliterate them with sword and fire. They were expecting God to rescue and vindicate His people.

And then somewhere in the remote and obscure reaches of the Empire, the message came that the Word of God had been spoken, that the very Word of God had at long last been made flesh!

But, to some Jews it was a "stumbling block" because they had expected someone who with sheer power and physical force would burst into history with a supernatural solution to the problems they faced. But, when the Spirit of God came, it came in an unexpected way.

Saint Paul writes that when Christ came, He was "born of woman". No one in those days expected that to happen. No one ever dreamed that the coming of the Messiah would be quiet and natural, like the birth of a child. What the Jews wanted was somebody who would, with one majestic sweep, correct the wrongs of that world, and what they got was a man filled with almost incredible love, humility and a deep sense of justice.

SAME WAY TODAY The situation is much the same way today. Some will say, "Look...if there is a God and He is all-powerful, why doesn't He show Himself in power? Why does He put an end to evil? Why doesn't He wipe out the hatred, the greed, the selfishness that afflict mankind? And why does He allow earthquakes and famines? Why does He allow the innocent to suffer? And sometimes we, like the people of Israel, want the fears and the evils that trouble human kind removed. Sometimes we - like them - look for some super-natural solution to bring about that change.

Yet, to be realistic, our concern here should not be with what we think God ought to do, but rather with what God in fact does do.

For me, God comes to us in human terms...yes, He continually comes into all of our lives, to show us that love is the way. Now this is not an arrogant assertion on my part. It is firmly grounded in what Jesus, our Lord, said:

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"
(John 14: 6)

For me, God comes to us in human terms to show us that love is the way. Jesus is love Incarnate, love in action. [^]Now...I want to discuss what effect love has upon those whom we love. In Him, we see life's highest hopes...its deepest meaning.

LOVE: TO BE CREATIVE First, love does everything in its power to encourage one to be creative. To be creative means to assert one's will in making decisions that affect life. To be creative is to have a sense of independence and self-assurance. A person cannot be controlled or coddled and be creative.

After that comment, some of you may be thinking about people who have been dominated and controlled by others, under the pretense of doing it for their welfare. You have seen what that kind of domination can do to the human spirit. God's humble, human entry into the arena of history is a clue to God's character. God does not interfere with anyone's free will. No one is forced to do anything against his own will.

If someone tells you that they love you, whether it's a parent or a spouse, no matter who it may be, and they attempt to control you, like a puppet on a string, you had better begin to do some very serious thinking about that relationship and the kind of love being professed. It may be a selfish and possessive type of love and that's not the Jesus kind of love.

LOVE: TO BE RESPONSIBLE Secondly, love does everything in its power to encourage one to be responsible. Beware of anyone who does everything for you, who doesn't allow you to exert the slightest bit of energy for yourself. The result of their efforts may be to make you a weak, helpless and dependent jellyfish, whether it's conscious or unconscious on their part.

God has made an unfinished world, which started with ignorance, superstition, poverty, sickness and death at a very early age, and we have struggled out toward something better. Now the unfinished nature of this world God has created tells us that God has placed a great deal of responsibility in our hands for ourselves, for each other, and for the world - to clean it up and to make it better.

LOVE: CREATION OF POWER

Third, and lastly, love brings about the creation of power.

Let me illustrate this by trying to define what I mean by love. To love someone is to deal with her or with him at a point in them that is beyond all of their virtues and their faults. To deal with them so totally that all aspects of their life may be exposed without their being threatened by that exposure. Now if someone loves you like that - that is power. And that is what God does for us, and that is what we do for each other when we care and love another in that way.

To love someone is to deal with him or her at a point in them that is beyond all of their faults and virtues. Think of it. What that means and what a source of power that then becomes.

There is yet one more thing to say about love and power, and that is that power also accrues to you when you love - for one who loves will do for the beloved what nothing else on earth can make them do.

CLOSING God comes to us in an unexpected way, not as a supernatural, celestial, and majestic being to solve the problems we face - both individually and collectively. He comes in fragile, human terms to show us that love is the way to life. And step by step, He asks us to walk that way remembering that love means creativity, it means responsibility and eventually, it means power for the human spirit.

LET US PRAY

"How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is
given.
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of
His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of
sin.
Where meek souls will receive him, still the
dear Christ enters in".

Mek us sensitive to Your presence, O God, in these quiet moments that come at the end of this Advent service. Prepare us for your coming, remembering how you came to us in the child of Bethlehem...quietly and humbly...we ask this in His name, who for so many continues to be "the Way, the Truth, and the Life". Amen