

Minimum Protection, Maximum Support

“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28: 20b

The question that the ending to the Gospel of Matthew (above) brings up is this: how is God with us?

Maybe we'd like God with us to protect us from the hassles of life. It's like the posting on a **church's prayer chain** that says, “Pray that Rita find an exciting job in Dallas, one with a nicer, less abusive boss than she has in Amarillo. Also, one that pays a lot more and with apartments nearby.”

Or maybe we'd like God with us to protect us from disease. Another posting goes like this: “Pray that Sam's doctors determine what is causing him to blank out and that it's not serious. Also, that they do it soon so he can leave Monday on his vacation to Bermuda.” Protect us, evidently, from inconvenience as well.

Who doesn't want God to protect him/her from losses of every sort, pain of every sort, etc.? But that's not my experience of God. I agree with Rev. William Sloane Coffin who says that God is with us more in terms of support than protection.

Coffin says, “All saving ideas are born small. God comes to earth as a child so that we can finally grow up, which means we can stop blaming God for being absent when we ourselves were not present, stop blaming God for the ills of the world as if we had been laboring to cure them, and stop making God responsible for the thinking and doing we should be undertaking on our own. I've said it before and will probably say it many times again: **God provides minimum protection, maximum support** – support to help us grow up, to stretch our minds and hearts until they are as wide as God's universe. God doesn't want us narrow-minded, priggish, and subservient, but joyful and loving as free for one another as God's love was freely poured out for us at Christmas in that babe in the manger.”

I have a friend who is known for saying, “No good deed goes unpunished.” In other words, there is minimum external protection. Try whistleblowing and see where it gets you. Still, people keep doing good deeds. Why? Maximum soul/inner being support. God strengthens us to what is right, whereas God doesn't always protect us from the consequences. Lots of people attack anyone who does the right thing.

It's interesting how when things are going just fine, we're happy to rely on our own strength. But when tough times arrive, our tendency is to want God to be strong so we can be weak. But one of the old church fathers said, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” And how can we be fully alive if God protects us so that we never risk or experience loss or pain? How can we be fully alive if we want God to make it all go away when we're besieged?

Norman Mailer once said, “There is no greater impotence in all that world than knowing you are right and that the wave of the world is wrong, yet the wave crashes upon you.” For followers of Christ, though, it is not impotence. Because of God's great support – think of daily bread in T.L.P. as daily spiritual nurture – we're able to get up and keep going. Even joyfully so! - DJ