

General André Cox

2. Juni um 21:00 ·

You will recall that at the commencement of the year I introduced the inspiration of a newspaper article which noted that whilst our school curricula sought to provide scholars with the foundational skills in a range of academic subjects to prepare them for their chosen career, one of the most important aspects of that process was the parallel development of the qualities or personal values which will mark that person for the rest of their lives. I was inspired to use that same idea to highlight what to me might be some of the values we would wish to see developing and evident in the lives, service and ministry of Salvationists everywhere.

Over the past months my previous messages have considered the subjects of Integrity, Faithfulness, Compassion, Respect and Honour. In this, my final letter of this series, I want to consider the subject of Strength.

As humans we are impressed with strength. Young men, especially, like to exercise and build up their muscles so that they can be seen as strong. Around the world we see evidence of people building up the appearance of strength; through position, wealth and the accumulation of power. Sadly, however, we also see – all too often – evidence of how strength can quickly lead to corruption, abuse and the taking of unfair advantage.

Strength is very necessary, but only when used in the right way. It would be impossible to adopt the values we have been thinking about over the past months without considerable strength of character. It takes strength to do what you know to be right; it takes strength to admit one's weakness and failure; it takes strength to stand up for someone else, even in the face of criticism.

Of course, it is easy to think we are strong but, as Martin Luther King wrote: The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

How much more do we need strong Christians so that we can stand firm in times of challenge or controversy: Strong in the upholding of our values, strong to protect the weak, strong to resist the evil one, strong to resist temptation, strong to walk the pathway of faith without wavering! Sadly, even within the church, we are often disappointed by those who fall into temptation and use their strength, power or influence for personal gain or to pursue a questionable agenda.

Of most importance is that for the Christian – and, therefore, within the Church – strength can and must only be in order that we might do that which is right. The Founder of The Salvation Army, General William Booth, included the following prayer in this famous song:

For strength to ever do the right,
For grace to conquer in the fight.
For power to walk the world in white,
Send the fire! (SASB 326)

God is not weak! Look at the power of the wind, see the strength of an earthquake, witness the destructive force of a fire! Yet there is more authority in God's still, small voice than in all these combined.

Christians can, though, appear to be weak in a worldly sense. Turning the other cheek and refusing to become involved in corrupt activities can be misinterpreted as having a lack of strength. But meekness is not weakness! Jesus had the greatest authority and strength in the world, but was nevertheless gentle, meek and mild.

If we respect the strength of God, we can be assured that His mighty power working in and through us can do immeasurably more than we can ever ask for or think of (Ephesians 3:20). In His strength we can conquer the foe!

The songwriter Sydney Cox (SASB 25) wrote of his confidence in the strength of God:

And though I cannot comprehend
Such love, so great, so deep,
In his strong hands my soul I trust,
He will not fail to keep.

It is my sincere prayer and hope that the values I have highlighted during these past months – which I consider to be the marks of Christ (Galatians 6:17) – will be our hallmark as we journey forward, making us vital and effective in all we do in His name.

As the Apostle Paul prays in the preceding verse (Galatians 6:16): Peace and mercy to those who follow this rule.

Commissioner Silvia joins me in praying that we will each be equal to these challenges.

AC