



July 15, 2020

THE POWER AND VULNERABILITY OF GOD

A great question was raised last week in a weekly discussion group I've been leading. We were talking about a sermon given by Rev. William Sloan Coffin, the minister of Riverside Church in New York City. In 1983, Coffin's son, who was about to graduate from Boston University, died in a car accident. About two weeks later, Coffin preached a sermon titled "Alex's Death," in which he reflected on the experience of grief, and proclaims that such an untimely death is never a part of God's will.

Coffin finds consolation in remembering that, when his son died, "*God's heart was the first of all our hearts to break.*"

That was the line that prompted the important question. How can God be all-powerful and vulnerable at the same time? How can God's heart break, when God is our strength, and a mighty fortress?

In other words, which is it? Is God strong and powerful, or is God vulnerable to heartbreak, grief, and suffering?

Yes.

Yes, God is strong and powerful. And yes, God experiences suffering and grief. Power and vulnerability are not mutually exclusive. That might be an easy idea to accept in the abstract. But see if you can pull that idea on like a pair of shoes and walk around.

In Jesus, God has entered the suffering of the world, from the tears that Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus to his last breaths on the cross. God's heart is broken – just like ours.

Now take the next step. As God joins us in grief, so does God join us to Jesus in new life. God raises up from the tomb those whose hearts have broken, those who have suffered, and those who have died.

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Matthew Wooster
Senior Minister