

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

—Colossians 2:15

[Sam to Frodo] It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going, because they were holding on to something. That there is some good in this world, and it's worth fighting for.

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers*

## LEARNING GOALS

1. To understand where satanic forces derive their power and authority.
2. To understand how Jesus disarmed all powers and authorities.
3. To embrace weakness, suffering, and loss as part of the mission of God.

## REFLECTION

I could tell you about the time my family was stranded in the middle of nowhere with two flat tires. Or I could tell you about the time Lily and I were trapped on the wrong side of a flooding river. Or I could tell you about the time my wife was robbed at gunpoint and locked in a freezer (seriously!). But I probably won't tell you about the time everything went perfectly as planned. Because that story is no fun to tell and a lot less fun to hear. It simply isn't worth telling. Which is the way stories go. Whether it is a true story, like the ones I mentioned above, or a work of fiction, good stories have good conflict, plain and simple. Those are the stories that "really matter" according to Samwise Gamgee in the quote above. If you haven't already, take a moment to read it before continuing.

It is no surprise, then, that the story that matters the most, the story of Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, is a story "full of darkness and danger." A story where our Lord Jesus Christ "had lots of chances of turning back only [He] didn't." It is the one thing that draws us to the person and character of Jesus Christ more than any other. He not only didn't turn back in the face of darkness and danger, but voluntarily submitted himself to them in order to bring about "some good in this world." That is where the true power of Jesus lies. Not in his miraculous, superhero-like ability. But in his humble willingness to set aside all that and willingly embrace the suffering of the cross.

That was something the world had never seen before. The world was familiar with power that was measured through the infliction of pain and violence on others; where people sought and maintained power through wars, torture, and executions. Still to this day we see power being sought and maintained in this way. Whether through a local robbery, or a global terrorist attack, people who seek power know no other way than through the threat of death. And that is why it was so humiliating when Jesus embraced a gruesome, torturous, death, and then showed himself later alive, majestic, and immortal. The powers and authorities were shown to have no power at all. Any threat of death is laughable in the face of the resurrection. Thus, as Paul states in Colossians 2:15, "having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

If that is true—if the powers and authorities truly have been disarmed as Paul tells us—then why are we so uncomfortable even talking about pain and suffering? Not that long ago I was talking with a new acquaintance about the premature birth of my oldest daughter. I told them about the long hospital stay and complications she endured early in life, but now lives happy and healthy. He told me his daughter was born in a similar way and now suffers from cerebral palsy. I was uncomfortable with the sudden influx of pain and suffering he no doubt endures to this day. I didn't know what to say, so I changed the subject.

This is, no doubt, a common occurrence among many Christians today. When suddenly met with the unexpected suffering of others, we shut down. If we say anything at all it is a pat answer like "Well, God has a plan." This reduces the awesome power of God's continued work in and through suffering. If God disarmed the powers and authorities through willful submission to pain and suffering, then we re-arm them when we run in fear at the slightest discomfort. What must raising a daughter with cerebral palsy be like? I will never know, and as far as I know, my new acquaintance bears that burden alone; or at least without any help from me. I was given an opportunity to fight and defeat evil in that moment, but I turned back cowering in fear at the power (and authority) suffering grants. I, and many Christians like me, granted these satanic forces with more power than they truly have. All because I was uncomfortable with someone else's suffering.

If we are going to truly accept our mission as the continued incarnation of Jesus on this earth, the body of Christ, then we have to become more comfortable with pain and suffering in all its forms. We have to be willing to walk down the road of "darkness and danger" and not turn back. This is our mission. This is the adventure calling us to live a story that "really matters," fighting for "some good in the world" by willingly embracing the weakness and suffering that makes Jesus so attractive. Will we continue the mission of God on behalf of the world? Or will we grant undeserved power to death and violence?

## LESSON PLAN

### 1. Engage

- a. What is your favorite story from your childhood? What story from your childhood captured your imagination more than any other?
- b. What was it about that story that captured your imagination?

### 2. Involve

- a. Read the quote above from *The Lord of The Rings*, or show the movie clip located here: <https://youtu.be/k6C8SX0mWP0>
- b. What makes a great story?
- c. What makes a story worth telling? List answers given on the board (Examples: conflict, danger, peril).
- d. Before teaching this class, try to think of a good personal story you like to tell in social settings.
  - i. Perhaps one you have told over and over again.
  - ii. Ask yourself why you tell that story.
  - iii. Observe that most of the personal stories we tell are of events that didn't go as planned.
  - iv. Consider telling such a story and point out that it wouldn't be a good story if everything had gone as planned.
- e. Draw everyone's attention back to the list of "what makes a story worth telling" on the board.
  - i. Ask: "What are the things we avoid most in life?"
  - ii. Point out any similarities in the answers to "stories worth telling" and "things we try to avoid."
- f. Read Colossians 2:15, and then read it again for emphasis.
  - i. What exactly is Paul saying about Jesus in this verse? What do you hear?
  - ii. Name some of the powers and authorities of this world. (Make a list on the board.)
  - iii. Another way of asking this is, "What scares you?"

1. Not haunted houses or scary movies. We are not asking about things that go bump in the night.
  2. What scares you beyond anything else in the world?
    - a. What goes too far—to the point where it’s not funny anymore?
- g. If you look at the last 15 years or so since 9/11, a lot of scary things have happened.
- i. 2001: 9/11 attacks (3,000 dead). The start of the war in Afghanistan.
  - ii. 2002: DC-area sniper attacks.
  - iii. 2003: The war in Iraq begins; the start of the Sudanese genocide.
  - iv. 2004: Indian Ocean Tsunami (over 230,000 dead).
  - v. 2005: Hurricane Katrina (over 1,800 dead).
  - vi. 2007: Virginia Tech shooting (deadliest school shooting in U.S. history.)
  - vii. 2008: Worldwide financial crisis in full swing.
  - viii. 2009: Shooting at Ford Hood.
  - ix. 2010: Earthquake in Haiti (over 300,000 dead); Gulf oil spill disaster.
  - x. 2011: The Tucson, Arizona, mass shooting; the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis in Japan.
  - xi. 2014: ISIS attacks.
  - xii. 2015: Paris terrorist attacks.
- h. It seems like the world is becoming a scarier and scarier place.
- i. How are these people/things able to scare us in this way?
  - ii. How do these authorities have and maintain their power?
- i. How did Jesus triumph over all powers and authorities including these?
- i. Jesus didn’t out-talk, outsmart, or overpower them.
  - ii. Somehow Jesus defeated all the powers and authorities of the world through suffering.
    1. In the most graphic fashion, the cross speaks of weakness and vulnerability.
    2. Yet it was at the cross that the powers and authorities were defeated.

3. In the weakness and vulnerability of the cross the powers and authorities were exposed and shamed.
- j. Think of any action and adventure movie where some power, force, or villain is threatening to kill the good guy (or someone the good guy loves).
  - i. How does the good guy win? (By not dying.) The good guy wins by outsmarting, out-talking, out-maneuvering, or outliving the bad guy.
  - ii. But that is in the movies. If it were real life, how long can the good guy prevent death? When he is 100 years old will he still be able to prevent death?
- k. At the time of Jesus, Rome was the most powerful empire in the world.
  - i. One of the ways they made sure everyone knew they were the most powerful was through crucifixion.
  - ii. Anyone who dared oppose Rome was hung on a cross.
  - iii. Jesus didn't allow them to have that power over them.
    1. By going to the cross willingly he took Rome's power away.
    2. If people were willing to embrace the cross, Rome could no longer intimidate.
    3. Death no longer has its power.

### 3. Challenge

- a. What if we believed death no longer has power? If death no longer has power, how are the powers and authorities (listed earlier) able to maintain the power they have?
- b. Read Hebrews 2:14–15
  - i. What if we were a community no longer held in slavery by our fear of death? What would that mean for us? For the world?
  - ii. Every generation grants these satanic forces with more power and authority than they really have.
- c. God defeated all power and authority through pain, suffering and loss. What does that mean for our own pain, suffering and loss? Read Colossians 1:24.

- d. How do we as the Body of Christ use weakness, suffering and loss in order to continue the battle to humiliate the powers and authorities of the world? How does weakness, suffering, and loss contribute to the mission of God in the world?