

Text:

“Indeed we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

Have you heard of Friedrich Nietzsche? He was a famous German philosopher who lived in the 1800s. He wrote many things that made people of his time very angry, but something that lots of people still remember are his thoughts about Christianity. To summarize, we might say that he believed Christianity was a religion for the weak, the troubled, or the stupid.

What do you think of that?

Nietzsche believed that people who are strong certainly don't need a religion built on a man like Jesus. Jesus taught that we should care for the weak people of the world. He taught that we should give up our own desires so that other people could have what they want and need. He taught that we should refuse to strike back when we are stricken by someone else. Even worse, Jesus allowed himself to be killed by people weaker than himself. Friedrich Nietzsche thought all this was ridiculous. Nietzsche thought that in a world where the strong are meant to win, and the weak are meant to lose, (1) protecting the weak and (2) refusing to fight for what you want, are the most foolish mistakes a person can make.

Well, what do you think? It's true that we seem to live in a world ruled by “the survival of the fittest,” isn't it. Just a while ago, the president of my home country decided to attack and invade another country—Iraq. Most of the other countries of the world didn't agree with this—he did it without UN sanction. Many Americans didn't agree with this. Most of the Christian churches around the world didn't agree with this. But our President did it anyway. He did it because he believes that it's perfectly natural for a strong country to do what it thinks is right, even if no one else agrees. Just like Nietzsche, he believes this is how the world fundamentally works—the strong must take control in the face of the weak.

As for me, I think Nietzsche made a few big mistakes. For one, I think Nietzsche misunderstood Jesus. I don't think Jesus was a weakling. As a matter of fact, I think Jesus was a clever leader, and that he believed in waging a kind of **war**. I think he came, not just to make people kind, but also to make people strong.

Think about this for a minute. When Jesus was hung on the cross there was a sign above His head. Do you remember what it said? It said, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” Every time we say the Lord's Prayer in chapel, we say something very interesting: “your Kingdom come.” What does that mean? Doesn't it seem interesting to you that we use *political* words to talk about Jesus--words like “King” and “Kingdom?” Those words remind you of power, not of weakness, right. Don't you think it's interesting that, when thousands of people started coming to hear Jesus' speeches, his country's leaders started to worry? Maybe they were worried that he would start a **revolution**? Huge crowds followed Jesus all around the country. The leaders knew very well that Jesus and his disciples could have raised a small army if they'd wanted to. When they finally arrested him, before the crucifixion, they sent a whole crowd of soldiers out to get him, with clubs and swords. Why?

I don't believe Jesus was weak—not for one minute. And I don't think Jesus calls us to be weak either. Rather, he calls us to wage war—but it's a **different** kind of war. It's a war to capture the human mind and spirit.

Let's read this Bible passage one more time. In this passage, Paul talks about having power and about fighting, doesn't he? But look closely at what he says about this "war." (read II Cor. 10:3-5)

According to Paul, Christians are not called to be weaklings; rather, we are called to be warriors. We are called to fight hard—to fight relentlessly, but to fight with "divine weapons."

You are probably thinking, "What does he mean? What are these weapons he's talking about? I thought Jesus was against war! And what does all this have to do with 'Flower Day'?" Well, let's think about that for a while.

But first, let's go back to Friedrich Nietzsche. The truth is that there are people like Nietzsche all around us. There are people who think that the strong have every right to hurt the weak. All around us—maybe even in this room—there are people who think that the purpose of life is to become strong—to rise above all the other people around them: to get the better job, to live in the nicer house, to have the higher rank, to become the smarter, the sexier, the stronger, the happier person. If they could only work hard, and "win," everything would be fine, they think. Fundamentally, they believe that people, just like a pack of wild dogs, have to fight with each other to get their share of the "prey." It's all about **competition**. After all, isn't this how life works?

But the problem is that this is *all wrong*. It's **fundamentally wrong**. And Jesus knew it. Jesus made one very simple observation: **the strong do not really win**. Jesus says, in his famous Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the **meek**, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

Some of you may know that I help lead a group of young boys in Yokohama's International Boy Scouts troop. We went on a hiking trip, recently. On the first day of the trip, one of the little 3rd grade boys, Yuta-kun, told me that he had had a bad time at school the day before, because there had been a fight. So I asked him, "Why was there a fight, Yuta?" Yuta-kun said, "Well, there's this boy in my class that's bigger than everyone else and taller than everyone else, and he likes to pick on people." So I asked Yuta-kun, "Does he always pick on people?" Yuta-kun said, "Yeah, usually. He likes everybody to know how strong he is." I asked, "Does he have any friends?" And Yuta-kun said, "No, not really. Everybody's just afraid of him."

When I was in school, I distinctly remember a girl who always sat next to me in class—everyone in school thought she was gorgeous. She was thin, she had beautiful, wavy, red hair and she always dressed perfectly. On top of that, she was the head cheerleader for the Basketball team--all the popular girls were cheerleaders. Guys were always following her around like a group of puppies following their mother. I thought she was very happy. But a few years after we graduated, I met her again at a restaurant where she was working as a waitress. After talking a little about our lives, she told me, "You know, everybody thought that I very popular in school, but actually I didn't have many real friends. As a matter of fact, I don't hang out with any of those people now. They all just wanted to be around me because I was popular with the boys."

You see, I think you students already know what Jesus knew—that **the strong do not really win**. You know it because you experience it every day. If you try to "win" by being tough, others will secretly fear you, and keep their distance from you. If you try to "win" by being beautiful, others will envy you and use you. If you try to "win" by getting more things than other people, other people will just want your things. If you try to "win" by gaining rank over others, the people "below" you will stop treating you like their friend. The truth--the truth that you already know--is that the **strong don't win**. As a matter of fact, the strong are usually the loneliest of us all.

And so we're in a war, friends. We are in a war for people's mind and spirits. But just like Paul says, "we do not wage war according to human standards--for the weapons of our warfare are not human." Remember Jesus: He turned the "human standards" completely upside down, didn't

he? Jesus was strong, not because he fought with people to get to the top, but because he **refused** power, and sided with the **weak**. Even today, Jesus is still remembered as a great leader, not because he raised a huge army, but because he became the **servant** of everyone he met. This is Jesus' divine weapon—his conviction that the person who becomes as powerless and as generous as a child is the person who finds true strength.

Today is "Flower Day"—it's a day when Christian organizations all over Japan distribute flowers to people in their neighborhoods as a way to share the love and kindness of Jesus Christ.

But giving to others can be more than that. It can be a way of waging a **spiritual war**. It's a way of doing just what Jesus did—of battling for people's minds. To treat other people better than yourself is a way of saying, "I'm not controlled by the rules of this ridiculous game. I don't have to be better than you, I don't have to be stronger than you, I don't have to be smarter than you; better looking than you; more important than you. I can choose to humble myself, and become your servant. And in serving you, I will find my happiness." **That** is true power. And, ultimately, that is the only weapon which "pulls down strongholds."

What about our friend, Nietzsche? He lived his whole life telling people that the strong should exercise power over the weak. But in his last days, he was walking along the streets of his town and saw a horse owner terribly beating his horse over the head with a large stick. The horse was tied to a post and couldn't get away. According to Nietzsche's own thinking, there was nothing wrong with this, right? The strong owner was beating the weak horse. But observers say that, when Nietzsche saw this, he burst out in tears, and fell to the ground, sobbing. Soon afterward, he was interred into an insane asylum, where he stayed almost until he died.

You are in a war, folks, whether you know it or not. It's a battle for people's minds. The kingdoms of the world say, "Become strong!" The kingdom of Christ says, "Become as powerless as a child and only then will you become truly strong!" The kingdoms of the world say, "Take!" The kingdom of Christ says, "Serve others, and then you will truly receive!"

I know you're fighting in this war—all of us are—but my question is, "Which side are you on?" Remember Jesus' words today, "All the first shall be last, and the last, first." Remember that—and you'll find discover a mysterious strength.