

Rogue Waves

As a lover of lonely places to walk, think and find beauty, I gravitate to Ecola Point, a prominence high above the restless seas of the northern Oregon coast. There are excellent paths, some lightly trod; and this day I ignored a danger sign and followed one of them down to a lovely curving beach populated by no one other than myself. Far out to sea, breakers pounded, carrying their energy across the sand in fast, flat waves, maybe ten inches high, with a sizzling sound, then gently dissolving into the sand around my feet. Ecstatic with this moment, I removed my tennis shoes and placed them on a big rock (remembering that there are such things as tides) and I went behind an outcrop at the far side of the beach to watch the waves zoom by.

While I sat spellbound, I began to notice that the longest-reaching waves were coming up on dry sand. Hmm. Tide must be coming in; time to get back to those shoes! It was more difficult than I expected, since water now covered the beach sand, and waves were crashing against smooth black stones, which covered the upper part of the beach. I made a dash for it between each wave, and was doing well when a huge log intervened. Having heard about logs being lifted up and crushing people, I decided to run way around it on the sand. I kept my eyes fixed on the log and away from the sea.

Wham!

A large wave propelled me directly into the log, which shuddered ominously. Hobbling up the field of black stones, I was disgusted that my binoculars were now fouled with salty sand. The rock on which my shoes were waiting was totally submerged; my footwear now belonged to the Pacific Ocean. As I stumbled towards the path, I noticed the same kind of rocks I was walking on, big, smooth black ocean-washed stones, high on the hillside. And I understood.

We have no trouble accounting for the really titanic waves – the tsunami generated by an earthquake, the giant swells from windstorms. We have learned, knowing the position of sun and moon, to predict tides in any particular location.

The “rogue wave” is a different creature, totally unpredictable. Waves are generated in many locations across the ocean, by winds blowing in different directions, the varying configurations of coastline, and seismic action. Most of the time the wave crests cancel each other out by the time they reach the shore; but once in a while, a wave from Japan, another from Hawaii, and one from a storm off California all crest at the same place. Amid a set of three-footers gently coming the beach, a high-energy six-footer appears from “nowhere.” A sneaker, or a rogue wave.

So rogue waves are not "freaks of nature", but are actually no more than the sum of many small waves whose origins are completely understandable. We simply do not have the mathematics to predict them, so we call them "random." But they are not random to the One who created the seas.

I love those times when a great wave of love, glory and worship rolls over. How I would like to recapture such a wave! But such special events of the Spirit are elusive. As Jesus described it, "You can hear the wind but you can't tell where it comes from or where it is going." We may think we are planning conditions for the next wave, and how to channel its energy - yet we barely understand what happens when God "moves." I have a feeling that thundering waves of worship are the sum of little waves - a reconciliation, a healing, a gift to a hungry family, a song, a sudden understanding of a Scripture. Sometimes everyone comes to church on a wave crest; all I have to do is sound the first chord, and whoosh! - off we go. Other times we're in a trough, madly rowing up the side of a wave, just to survive. Probably most of the time, we're just bobbing up and down. Will we some day reminisce, "I remember that mighty wave..." and we don't know if in the long run, it had any more value than just a happy memory.

Certainly more reconciliation, more healing, more generosity, more of God's Word in us will make bigger waves; but there is also the factor of the Holy Spirit of God simply blowing upon us. His Spirit acts upon the "water" of our life in different ways. Sometimes He calms the waves, making the sea as smooth as glass. Sometimes He comes bubbling up from within, as from a Perrier spring. God's waves bear purpose beyond excitement - they surge up, flooding our dry riverbeds to bring life. He spoke through Isaiah: "I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams."

This one thing I know - you don't get big curlers breaking on the shore if there is no ocean behind them, an ocean that is continually blown upon by winds over all the world. "My words are spirit... the Spirit brings life." When we act according to the word of Jesus, that breeze begins to blow, causing a small swell on that great ocean. We don't know how it will combine with other swells or upon which shore it will break; but we do know that nothing we do, not even giving a child a glass of water, will fail to have the effect God desires.

Live and work and walk in the Spirit today, and don't give a care if the waves break on your shore of off Zanzibar. God has others all over the world making waves - let's make some of our own!

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