

Sea glass and suffering

by Jackie Mill

I love to walk along a beach, revelling in the long, isolated stretches of sand and rocks, the wind sometimes caressing gently or greedily tearing at clothes and hair, and the water incessantly restless. It is never the same but always exhilarating. A few times the waves have rushed in unexpectedly and I have had to dance quickly to safety, or go home with slightly sodden feet.

It is there where the water meets the shore that there are the most exciting finds: a beautiful, polished pebble; a fragile shell which is miraculously whole; or the best treasure of all, a piece of sea glass.

If I spy one of these rare treasures, I quickly pick it up and check to see if it is a “keeper”. A keeper has to be smooth with no sharp edges. The best bits are coloured and somehow translucent when held up to the sunlight. It is in the sunlight that they are at their best. Their once bright colours somehow softened by the rough treatment in the sea, muted by their harsh treatment, yet still beautiful.

If I deem it worthy of taking home, I slip it into my pocket where my fingers enjoy the cool smoothness, and with lifted heart I go in search of



more. I've become a bit addicted to searching for sea glass when I walk. Sea glass is a bit like shoes: you never have enough.

Those gem-like slivers of glass make me think of people. I am often struck by how some people seem to grow through their suffering. Life tosses them about unfairly, but somehow their true beauty shines through despite it. It is as if they become more beautiful, more precious, because of their suffering. Those that weather life's storms become easier to love and to hold, while others seem to have everything they want, yet still have sharp edges that make them more demanding, more selfish, and more difficult to love. They cut at others with their unkindness. They are not quite ready yet and still have some bits that needed smoothing out.

People ask: if there is a God, why does he allow suffering? I don't have the answer, but I wonder if it has something to do with growing through suffering. Maybe there are things we need to learn through suffering

that we cannot learn anywhere else. Don't get me wrong. Too much suffering often breaks people like the shells and glass that become small grains of sand if they are beaten against the rocks too much. No one wants to suffer, but maybe if we can see it as an opportunity to grow and learn, something beautiful can come as a result.

My friend Jilly loves sea glass too but she doesn't just collect it like me. She makes beautiful things out of the treasures she finds on the seashore. She is highly skilled and can turn broken bits of pottery and glass into something wonderful. One day she gave me a gift of an angel made from things discarded by the sea. Somehow it is more precious because its beauty was hard won, the result of suffering.

I am inclined to believe that God is highly skilled and can turn our suffering into something precious and of infinite value. Sea glass is one small piece in the puzzle that makes me more and more certain of that.