

## From the Pastor's Desk

### Where is God in Haiti?

*"We were all together on the same floor, when the building began to shake and we panicked and started running. Jonathan and I were together, but my husband Ben was hugging a pillar in the middle of the floor. When I turned and saw him, concrete began to fall on him. I called for him and started running toward him." At that moment the two floors above collapsed on them. Jonathan and Renee were trapped for a short time, but managed to squeeze out onto the roof of the building and called for Ben. The collapsed building continued to shift in the aftershocks. The two went back to the place where they had crawled out and called again for Ben. Renee said she heard Ben's voice. He was singing, not unusual for Ben who loved music. "I told him I loved him, and that Jon and I were okay, and to keep singing," Renee said. "But the singing stopped after he sang the words 'God's peace to us we pray'. If he was alive, he would have been calling for help desperately," Renee said. "Ben spent his last breath singing." The next day Renee and Jonathan went back to the building, managed to get their passports, and did what they could to locate Ben, but could not find him. "Getting off of that roof was the most difficult thing I've ever had to do," she said. (From the ELCA News Service)*

Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world where pain and suffering were present on a massive scale prior to the earthquake. Now thousands of people, including ELCA seminary student Ben Larson, lay under the rubble in Port-au-Prince. Watching images on television of the suffering in Haiti is heartbreaking.

After viewing this tragedy, a pastor emailed me these words: *We do have trouble, don't we, understanding our faith after Haiti. Whatever or Whoever is in charge is an Intelligence and Energy and Liveliness we can't begin to understand. Obviously, God hides -- in a cloud of unknowing -- and Haiti adds to our unknowing. I am just bewildered and at a loss for any understanding. What God asks of us is just so unexpected: silence, surrender, compassion -- when we'd like to fill the silence with words.*

My Uncle died in a tragic airplane accident many years ago. Because of wind shear, his small plane went down nose first into a hillside in South Dakota. During the funeral the pastor said, "God is making a bouquet of flowers in heaven and needs Eddie to complete his bouquet." After the funeral, Uncle Lloyd told the pastor that his sermon brought no comfort and he had little time for a God that needed his brother to complete his bouquet. Often, we pastors consider it our job to try and explain the unexplainable, only to open our mouths to change feet.

One televangelist put both feet in his mouth when he declared on national television that God sent this earthquake to Haiti to punish them because of a deal Haitians supposedly made with the devil a couple of hundred years ago (of which there is no historical evidence), in order to free themselves from the oppressive rule of the French. This logic would presume that when visiting parishioners in the hospital,

he would inquire what sins they have committed that has caused God to make them sick. It would be understandable if he was hit in the back of the head with a bedpan on his way out the door.

The earthquake in Haiti was the result of seismic activity deep in earth's tectonic plates. Could God have stopped this from happening? We want to say yes, but then we are left with the same sermon as Uncle Eddie's during his funeral, but with a much larger bouquet. Or the vengeful God of the televangelist. If we lived in Haiti, and it was our loved ones under the rubble, this could lead to a crisis of faith. We need not live in Haiti, this can occur in Canon City while sitting in a hospital room next to a loved who is dieing, and we find ourselves full of resentment at God.

Our Christian faith offers us an insight into the conflict between a God of love and the experience of human suffering. Central to our faith is the cross from which Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Even Jesus wondered where God was as he suffered. As a Trinity of persons, God both died on the cross and wept for his Son. God suffers with us and now weeps with the Haitian people. Wherever there is human tragedy and pain, the incarnate and crucified God is there.

We long for more answers, but are left with silence and mystery held in the mind of God. We trust that the intelligence and power who created the universe will one day enable our minds to understand.

In the midst of suffering we look through the lens of hope. Pain, suffering and death are the nature of Good Friday, but Easter Sunday is coming. Hope is a bridge to eternity that tells us all will be well.

A faith community is important especially when we experience suffering. Our sisters and brothers in Christ cry with us and proclaim faith for us when we are too weak and devastated to do so. With their love and encouragement, and the spiritual nourishment of bread and wine, hope returns to broken lives.

Where is God in Haiti? He is hope in the midst of hopeless. He is seen in the compassion of people distributing food, water, clothing, medical treatment and shelter to suffering people. He is in the unity and compassion we feel with those who suffer.

~ PB

### Haiti Cries and We Cry with Them

Earth shaking, home breaking, broken bodies, broken hearts, broken lives.

Haiti cries and we cry with them.

God, our hearts are aching as we try to imagine what the daylight brought to our brothers and sisters in Haiti. Heal the young eyes that have seen far too much on this day.

Heal the hearts of many who have lost friends, family and livelihood. Be with those who are missing and those who are dying outside the grasp of loving hands to hold them and loving voices to soothe them.

Move us from empathy to action and from sympathy to substance as we contemplate what can be done to help today, and many days, into a forever-changed future.

Amen.

(From Safiyah Fosua, United Methodist Church)

Contributions can be made to:  
**ELCA Int'l Disaster Response**  
**Attn: Haiti Earthquake Relief**  
**PO Box 71764**  
**Chicago, IL 60694-1764**