

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward Jr. + Rector

"Reflections on the Earthquake in Haiti"

ANOTHER DISASTER

This past week we have all witnessed another natural disaster of epic proportions. The earthquake in Haiti caught all by surprise. Earthquakes have a tendency to do that. They are the most deadly of all natural disasters. And when the reports went out that the epicenter was just outside of the Haitian capital, Port Au Prince, you knew that the death toll would be catastrophic, especially in a country as poor as Haiti.

I thought to myself, how horrible it would be if you were visiting the country on a missions trip and this happened. I then found out the next morning that indeed one of our local pastors was in Haiti with a group from First Trinity Lutheran Church on Niagara Falls Blvd. Thankfully, Pastor Chuck Whited and the rest are fine. They arrived on Monday and drove out to the orphanage 120 miles out from the capital. They still felt the earthquake, however. As reported in *the Buffalo News*, while Pastor Whited and his son were on the second floor of the orphanage, all of a sudden they heard the wall crack, things began to shake, and he saw people running outside. He and his son ran out of the building to open ground. He described the experience as feeling wobbly, almost dizzy. And they were over a 100 miles from the epicenter of the quake!

Naturally, when things like this happen we ask why? We are shaken up emotionally and even spiritually. Earthquakes are caused by the movement of the tectonic plates of the earth crust along various fault lines. This movement, in turn, is the result of the build-up of pressure and stress over many, sometimes hundreds of years between the various plates. Eventually something has to give and the ground rumbles, shakes and sometime even cracks open. I think the reason why earthquakes are particularly disconcerting is that the very thing that is supposed to be the most stable and solid in the natural world gives way and there is nothing you can do about it except get to open ground and wait it out.

What's interesting is that earthquakes are mentioned many times in the Bible. They are part of the curse but they are also part of God's plan. In fact, earthquakes teach us valuable spiritual truths and life lessons. First, the spiritual truths:

SPIRITUAL TRUTHS

Please turn with me to **Mt. 24:7**. Jesus is speaking to his disciples on the Mount of Olives concerning the signs that will proceed His Return and in verse 7, He says, ***"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes."***

Jesus warned that there would be earthquakes and that they would intensify before His return. He is quoted as saying such things in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Luke includes the words, ***"Great Earthquakes"*** in **Luke 21:11**.

The prophet Zechariah declared that there would be a great earthquake in Jerusalem when Jesus returns to the Mount of Olives: ***"On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of***

Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south." (Zech. 14:4)

EARTHQUAKES DEMONSTRATE THE AWESOME POWER OF GOD

Job 9:6: *He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble.*

Psalm 104:32: *He who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke.*

Jer. 4:24: *I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying.*

Ps. 60:2: *You have shaken the land and torn it open; mend its fractures, for it is quaking.*

It is clear from those verses that earthquakes reflect the awesome power of God, albeit in a small way. In fact, God used an earthquake to set the Apostle Paul and Silas free from prison in Acts 16. And we see God's power reflected in this way during two of the greatest events in history. There was an earthquake after Jesus was crucified. **Mt. 27:51:** ⁵¹*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split."*

There was an earthquake after our Lord rose from the dead. **Mt. 28:2:** *"There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it."*

EARTHQUAKES HIGHLIGHT THE COMING OF GOD'S WRATH AT THE END OF THE AGE

Now not only will there be earthquakes both prior and during Christ's return, but they are in fact, reminders that He will one day judge the earth. Listen now to these verses:

Psalm 18:7: *"The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because He was angry."*

Is. 13:13: *"Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger."*

Is. 29:6 *"The LORD Almighty will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire."*

Ez. 38:19 *"In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel."*

In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John describes a number of earthquakes taking place prior to the Lord's Return and accompanying His Judgment.

What is fascinating about the Lord God using earthquakes as a tangible symbol of His judgment is that just as earthquakes are the result of the build-up of pressure and stress in the earth, so too is God's judgment the result of the build-up of His anger over the ages. God, we are told in the Bible, is lovingly patient but He will not relent from His wrathful indignation forever.

There is one more spiritual truth I would like to highlight and this applies to every believer.

EARTHQUAKES SHALL NOT SHAKE THE BELIEVER

Listen now to **Ps. 46:2-3: "*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*"**

Why? v.1 tells us "*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*"

While earthquakes are part of the fall and the curse, and will be a means of God's judgment at the end of the age, for the believer there is ultimately nothing to fear. God is our refuge and strength. God will save us even as the earth is destroyed. God's Word gives us the assurance of His ever-present help no matter where we find ourselves.

LIFE LESSONS

So what else can we learn from earthquakes? Not only do they reflect spiritual truths but they give us some valuable lessons concerning life, itself.

1) Life is fleeting. The earthquake in Haiti was only 35 seconds long and yet in that very short time over 100,000 people died, and the capital city was pretty much destroyed. Our lives are not only short, *a vapor that appears for a little while and is gone* as James 5 tells us, but we do not know the day or the hour of our death. Whether it be a heart attack, a car accident, or a natural disaster, in just seconds, our lives can change forever. It is why Jesus said we must always be ready to meet the Lord. Are you ready?

2) We need to be prepared as much as possible for life's "earthquakes." In other words, we need to prepare as much as possible for the unpleasant surprises and sudden tragedies that befall all who walk this planet. The last time I addressed a natural disaster was after Hurricane Katrina back in 2005. But sooner or later we knew we would have to address another one. So too in our lives. Sooner or later we will be in the valley. Sooner or later we will be facing one of life's little earthquakes. How do we prepare? By growing in our relationship with the Lord. Jesus never promised an easy road. Storms will still come. Hardship and disappointment will be a reality. But Jesus also promised that He would never leave us. Jesus also promised that His Holy Spirit would be with us. Jesus also promised that through Him we can and will overcome. In other words, when we are trusting and relying upon the Lord, He can transform any bad situation into a good one. But if you don't have the Lord you will just go from bad to worse.

Haiti is a perfect case in point. There are many reasons why that nation is suffering the way it is. First, many are involved in Voodoo - it is a pagan religion filled with the belief of different spirits, animal sacrifice and even human sacrifice, though the latter is not officially condoned and is often done in secrecy. The spiritual attitudes and beliefs affect a nation. It is a nation made of former slaves so the psyche of its citizens can predispose them to fatalism. It is also a nation that has been filled with corruption and violence. It has had an unstable and chaotic history. You can't build a solid foundation when such things are going on. And if you don't have a foundation, you are sunk when the storms of life come! In 1989, California suffered a similar 7.0 earthquake and only 69 people died. Why? There was a better foundation. We need to make sure we are building our spiritual lives on the Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is a third life lesson?

3) When there is a need or a problem we, as Christians, are called to respond. The Bible is clear: when our neighbor is in need we are to reach out and help meet that need in the name of Christ. It is one of the ways we shine the light of Christ. We are our brother's keeper. It has been great to see so many in our world coming together to help the people of Haiti. As the Church, we need to do our part. In fact, we need to excel more so than others!

This morning all here are asked to consider making a donation to the *Anglican World Relief and Development Fund*. This ministry will be reaching out to the many Anglican/Episcopal Churches that are located in Haiti. While first responders are engaged in search and rescue and many aid organizations are engaged in bringing badly needed relief in the form of water, food, and medicine, Churches will be vital in the ongoing recovery of the nation.

In addition, we need to pray for the people of Haiti. We need to pray that good would come from this tragedy; that it would be a wake-up call for the nation and for the world to repent; that God would raise up men and women committed to Jesus Christ, committed to building their lives and their nation on the Word of God. That may friends, is Haiti's only hope and it is our only hope as well. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!