

Wednesday Lenten Sermon

When bad things happen; not when bad things only happen to people who have done something wrong and need to be punished by God. Bad things are going to happen—to all of us. So why does a loving and just God allow bad things to happen? I don't know for sure, but here is what I believe.

We have a God who created us with the gift of free will because God wants to be in relationship with us humans not with puppets. God wants honest feelings from us whether they are love, joy, sadness or even anger. But by giving us free will, God has also given us the opportunity to make bad choices. Martin Luther believes that because of sin we are only able to choose the bad and not the good on our own. And when we make bad choices, we have no idea how they will or when they will affect others.

God has also created this world with weather and earthquakes that help to sustain life on this earth. When the forces of nature and humanity collide—nature always wins! When people build on flood plains in the path of a category 5 hurricane; people and buildings are going to be destroyed. Rain and wind are necessary for sustaining life on this planet.

Earthquakes are also necessary for life here on Earth. As Adam Hamilton states in his book, "Earthquakes are the result of a process that actually cools the core of our planet, produces mountain ranges, and creates the earth's magnetic fields. Under the surface of the earth, magma is super-heated at the core; it rises like hot air and then spreads and cools as it comes closer to the surface of the earth. As it spreads it carries the earth's plates, moving them. The magma cools, falls back toward the core, reheats and rises again, continuing the movement of the earth's plates. The plates rub against one another, eventually getting stuck. When the plates finally break free they release massive amounts of energy. This process is essential for life on our planet."¹

¹ Hamilton, Adam "When Christians Get It Wrong," p81

I found out in a very personal way on January 12, 2010 what happens when a poor nation like Haiti builds on top of these plates with material not able to withstand an earthquake. One of my classmates, his wife and his cousin were doing their J-term in Haiti helping local pastors teach the people about God and Jesus. When the earthquake struck his wife and cousin were able to make it out of the cement building they were staying in—he did not. The last words Ben's wife heard were of him singing a hymn of praise to God.

Do I believe that God was there shaking the earth and causing Ben to be crushed to death? No, but I do believe that God was there. God was there in the people who helped Jon and Renee to safety. God was there in the people who tended to the sick and dying, who comforted the mourning, who brought food, clothing and shelter to those who were still alive. God was there in the form of the people who didn't stop searching until Ben's body was found and brought back to his family. God was not the cause of the earthquake, but God was the hope, comfort and strength for those who were left alive. God is the only hope for those who lost loved ones that they will be reunited at the last.

So when we Christians get it right; we are like Job's friends—we sit, we're silent and we grieve with them. We don't try to explain what we don't know. But we can tell them what we do know—that we have a God who loves us enough to become one of us, to know and feel what we are going through. We have a God who loves us enough to die for us, to forgive us of all our sins so that we can be in a right relationship with God again. We have a God who walks with us through all of the muck and mire of our lives and when it becomes too unbearable our God picks us up and carries us until we are strong enough to walk on our own.

When we get it right we follow the example of Jesus. We feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned and give drink to the thirsty. We comfort the bereaved and pray for those who have no words left to pray. Because sometimes the only face of God that someone might see is yours.