

Easter Sunday Sermon 4-4-10

Given by the Rev. David Michaud, Rector
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Luke 24:1-12

In the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti there were those that saw the hand of God in that destruction. As I have already mentioned from this pulpit previously, Pat Robertson in particular saw this as God punishing the Haitian people for a supposed voodoo pact made with the devil 200 years before. I contend that God is not there in the destruction, that this is not where we should look for God. Where should we look for God?

This week as I was preparing my sermon I ran across a story on the Internet written by American journalist Dan Whoolley who survived the earthquake having been trapped in a building. I recommend going to Dan Whoolley's Facebook page and reading this account in its entirety. Listen to some of what he wrote about his experience:

I am a survivor.

On January 12, 2010, a major earthquake shook Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, ... Within seconds of the earthquake, I found myself trapped at the bottom of a collapsed six-story hotel with my leg pinned, blood flowing from the back of my head, and a large gash on my leg.

Breathing thick dust and hearing loud sounds of falling debris and shouts for help, I determined that my blindness was due to absolute, complete darkness and the loss of my glasses.

Dan Whoolley was in effect, entombed. He continues...

Then, the reality of my situation washed over me. I had just survived a major, major earthquake. ... Given the building's instability, the unknown severity of my injuries, rescue efforts likely delayed for some time, I put my chances at 20-30 percent that I would survive long enough to be rescued and return to my family.

It is not easy to come to the conclusion that you are likely to die soon. I know many people face this in the seconds before an impending car accident, or in the months following a terminal medical diagnosis, but this was my first time in a life-or-death situation, and I didn't know whether I had minutes, hours, or days for this question to haunt me: "Am I ready to die?"

Am I sure of my eternal destiny - really sure? Upon crossing the threshold, will I hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant," or will I hear, "Depart from Me, I never knew you."?

Is my current lukewarm condition with God - weak devotional life, stilted prayer life, too-active sin life - an indication that I have deceived myself about my faith in Christ? Are my beliefs about God really true? Am I His beloved?

I addressed these questions, truly some of life's primary questions, immediately and with more seriousness than anything ever before. I could write pages on what this process involved, but to summarize: in my dark hole, I spent time praying, confessing, listening, reciting Scripture, and even in worshiping. And God met me where I was, with my big questions and doubts, and he wrapped me in his love. In the midst of my insecurity and doubt, God showed me that my heart was aligned with his heart by giving me opportunities to minister to the others trapped with me.

And because he chose to work through me, I knew, once again, that I am His, and He is mine....

I cannot explain how God did it, but at some point during my communion with him, I came to believe that his will in this situation was perfect, and that I could trust him and be OK with either outcome. I still pleaded with him to return me to my family, as I feverishly desired, "but Thy will be done."

Having time was an unexpected luxury, and I used it to tie up some loose ends in case my body was found with my pocket journal intact. To my wife, I wrote some long-needed notes of love, reminding her of my deep and loving commitment to her and reminiscing about some special memories. To my boys, among other things, I wrote this note: "I was in a big accident. Don't be upset with God . . . He always provides for His children, even in hard times. I'm still hoping that God will get me out, but he may not. But he will always take care of you."

God's plan for my life included a miraculous rescue 65 hours after the earthquake - a rescue that brought me back to sunlight, safety, and my family. I still have not found words to express the joy I felt when I was in the arms of my wife, and days later, my kids. There are no words. Now I find myself back home with my family, adjusting to the changing realities of life and healing.

He ends his account with this conclusion...

God used a crisis (literally an earth-shaking disaster) as a catalyst to get me to address fundamental issues in my life. My advice is that you don't let it come to that in your life.

I am a survivor, and God has given me a new life.

Is God in the destruction of the earthquake? He is not there. If you want to find God in this Haitian tragedy seek him instead as he comforts and is present with Dan Whoolley, or the thousands and thousands of survivors of the earthquake. That is where God is. Among the living.

On Easter morning, the women came back to the tomb they had left on Good Friday and expected to see Our Lord's body in the tomb, that final resting place, the end. But something odd had happened. The stone had been rolled away. The body was not there. Instead there were two angels whose presence terrified the women. And they said, Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. God is not in the tomb, he is among the living.

Do not look for our Savior here. For he is alive and he is among those who are alive.

The women brought the Good News of Jesus being resurrected and alive to the apostles, who doubted. Then Peter went and saw that what the women said was true, and his life and those of all believers were changed forever. They boldly proclaimed the good news that death did not triumph. That Christ has trampled upon sin and death, and is alive.

We know that Jesus then appeared to many, many people after his resurrection. He was no longer bound by mortality, by the limits of time and space, and so would appear at different times and in different places, with people knowing his presence. I believe he was also present in that collapsed building with Dan Woolley. He is also with those who have gone before us. He is with us in our darkest hours and in our finest moments. He is risen. He is alive.

And we as an Easter people rejoice at his presence with us. We fear not death, for Jesus is there.

We fear not struggles and adversity, for Jesus is there. We fear not strife, evil and injustice for with Jesus who overcame death and the grave, we too will overcome all such challenges. Dan Whoolley came to understand this in that collapsed building when he said *And God met me*

where I was, with my big questions and doubts, and he wrapped me in his love.

May we rejoice that Christ is risen and is working in our lives today, bestowing on us forgiveness and his everlasting love. May we proclaim by word and deed this good news today and every day of our lives.

Alleluia.