

Series: BREATHING ROOM—January 17, 2010

WHEN THE WORLD CRIES...

1. Every so often the entire world faces a defining moment. We're just going along, doing normal things—working, eating, shopping, buying gas, stuck in traffic on the DVP, ordering pizza, texting friends—and we hear news that stops us cold, whether it's 9-11, the Boxing Day tsunami, Katrina. And suddenly our problems and frustrations and hassles and worries seem very, **very** small.

-The reports and images and stories of the past five days in our world tell a story of unspeakable tragedy. Any tragedy is hard—no matter what soil it happens on, right? But the people of **Haiti**? People who are already victims of devastating poverty? Where they sell—and people eat—cooked **mud** patties flavored with spices? And now this—for people who are already so vulnerable? It seems **so** unfair.

- a. You've seen the images and heard about the losses. The loss of life in itself is just horrendous. We can barely grasp the thought of a group 1/5 the size of Markham dying in one city. And then there are the needs of those who have survived—apparently 3 **million** people who find themselves without the bare necessities they need simply to **survive**.

-And the loss of schools, hospitals, government offices, police—all the infrastructure that we just take for granted—**gone!** Hard to imagine, isn't it? And in the middle of all this mess, the earthquake affected a prison—and 4000 prisoners have been released into a very vulnerable population. Everywhere you look—**loss**. What few possessions people had. Loss of life. Loss of family members. Loss of safety. Unimaginable loss.

-But the **worst** loss in all of this could be the loss of hope. Most people can handle loss a number of losses. But if we lose hope—that takes with it all of our energy reserves. We give up. We don't just lose the will to live, we lose the will to try. And when people lose hope—even decency doesn't matter anymore.

- c. When we see tragedies of this magnitude, the one word that describes how **we** feel is—overwhelmed! Totally overwhelmed. We feel small. We think, **Somebody needs to do something!** Governments have pledged millions to help. Even credit card companies have voluntarily returned **swiping** fees.
-But hope isn't rekindled through encouraging news reports of what countries plan to do; hope—and life—comes in the form of a flesh and blood human hand; through the eyes of a caring person looking into your eyes. Hope pours into awful, desperate situations when real—like you and me—who struggle with our own pride and selfishness and sense of need--feel someone else's pain, pray, care—and show tangible compassion. Inconvenience ourselves—to help bring the basics of human life to others. And that's what we want to do.

2. Want to know what frustrates me? It's when Christian leaders go public, as at least one did this past week in telling everyone **why** this happened. I want to say, "Wait a minute! You don't speak for me—and you don't speak for God, either!"

-Why would we presume to tell everyone why things like this happen—when Jesus who, as the Son of God, had the **perfect** chance to explain **why**—and didn't. And it's interesting to see how Jesus responds when he was pushed to do so.

-Luke, an early writer, records a time when Jesus had just spoken in being able to properly interpret the times. Someone in the crowd pulled out a current event report on some Galilean slaughtered by Pilate in the Temple. The current thinking of that day was that if something bad happened—it was because you sinned. They were expecting Jesus to say, "Well, if you would read the signs right, you would know **why** that happened to them."

-Instead, Jesus mentions another tragedy—where a tower had collapsed and killed 18 people. He then asks this question: **Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem?** And the answer is? **No!**

- a. Why does awful stuff like this happen in our world? We aren't told **why**—just that sin, in general, has had a catastrophic effect on this entire planet—and everyone and everything on it. **And** we are told to resist our ever-present urge to philosophize about it—and then pass judgment.
- b. There's another time when Jesus faced this same kind of thinking—only it was from his followers. John 9 records an encounter Jesus and his disciples had with a man born blind. They asked the **why** question:

Why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents sins? (John 9:2 NLT)

-Jesus made it clear that his blindness had nothing to do with anyone's sins. He said,

This happened so that the power of God could be seen in him. We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming when no one can work." (John 9:3b-4 NLT)

-Do you see what Jesus is getting at? He's saying, "**Why**" doesn't really matter when people are experiencing pain and disability; what matters is that the power of God be shown through our active love and compassion. Pain—need—loss is a place where God can work. Our calling is to quickly take action—**do** what we have been given the opportunity to do! And as if to make His point, Jesus healed this guy—and the effect on his life and every life around him was **stunning**.

3. The teaching of Jesus in these circumstances is exactly the same as it was in his story of the Good Samaritan. Love always calls us to engage. To do for others what we would hope they would do for us if we were the victims.

-In fact, it's interesting. Remember the occasion above when Jesus was asked about the slaughter of the Galileans? Let me read his full response:

“Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than all the other people from Galilee?” Jesus asked. “Is that why they suffered? Not at all! And you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God. (Luke 13:2-3 NLT)

-To use earthquake language, Jesus is saying, “The people in Haiti and California aren’t the only ones living on a fault line. Everyone lives on a **fault line.**” That’s true with us—geologically. There’s a fault line that apparently runs from Burlington—under Western Lake Ontario—right through Toronto.

-But it’s deeper and more profound than that. Not only do we live on a deeply flawed planet; we all live in borrowed space. And we all live on borrowed time. In times like these—our calling is to understand our own frailty, our own limits—and make sure we do the work that God has laid out for us to do. Jesus says, “Take advantage of the time you have because you have **no** idea what the future holds.”

4. John Deacon wrote to me earlier this week and made this statement: “Jesus described [earthquakes] as **birth pangs** and somehow, in the broad scope of things, that’s about as good an explanation as I’ve heard.”

-Let me read this from the context. Jesus is talking about the end times—and when He will come again—and says:

And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don’t panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won’t follow immediately. Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in many parts of the world. But all this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come. (Matthew 24:6-8 NLT)

-**Birth pains.** Contractions. Labor pain. Braxton hicks. Most of you have either **been** through this—or know someone who has: Your mother. They call it **birth pain—labor**—for a reason. It’s painful—and it’s hard. Knowing this, why would **any** woman ever let herself become pregnant? I’ve known women who **curse** their husbands in the delivery room—and maybe even want to take his life.

-But there’s a reason why women go through this. It’s because something **better**—way more profound—is coming. The stuff we hate most—like war, famine and earthquakes—can be seen from two perspectives; as needless suffering that we blame God for—cause no one else is available. **Or** as birth pains, labor, the delivery of another Kingdom, initiated by Jesus—and then coming slowly but surely in the pain and mess of this world.

-And in the very next chapter, Jesus clarifies what His people will be up to:

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me...And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’ (Matthew 25:34-36, 40 NLT)

5. As you know, we started a series last week called ***Breathing Room***—about reclaiming the margin in life. Margin in our energy, emotional health, money and time. It would appear that the events of this week ***disrupted*** the series. It didn't. This week in Haiti provided a ***perfect*** illustration of why we ***need*** margin.

-See, sometimes we need, as the people of Jesus, to set aside all of our plans and do what ***He***, through His Spirit, is leading us to do. But it takes margin. How can you do anything to help anyone else—if your life is overbooked, over-committed, and up to your nostrils in debt.

-Margin, friends, is not primarily about us just having a better life where we catch our breath. It's having the space to love God—and love others. From what I see, God doesn't so much write the book of our lives—He works and writes mostly in the margins. But for Him to do that—we have to allow ***space*** to care.

-How we respond to this crisis as the people of Jesus—as salt and light—***could*** be our finest hour. There's still room for God to bring something really good out of an awful situation. In fact, that's where God does His best work.