

From the Rector's Desk

Where is God in this Mess?

On January 12th the nation of Haiti was devastated by an earthquake of magnitude 7.0, the strongest earthquake to strike that beleaguered island state in 200 years. The next morning we received a personal note from a Haitian Episcopal priest from Port-Au-Prince: "There is no Cathedral. The entire Holy Trinity complex is gone. The convent for the Sisters of St. Margaret is gone. The Bishop's house is gone. College St. Pierre is gone. In Grand Colline, the church is gone. In St. Martin of Tours, the kindergarten is gone. In St. Etienne Buteau the church, the rectory and the school are gone."

The worst was still to be reported. The next morning we sat horrified by images of utter devastation on our television screens. There is no place to bury thousands of dead. An American survivor wrote on Twitter: "Piles of cadavers were burned today. Only other option was to let them rot. I have soot on me. That soot contains human DNA. God help us." More than two million survivors are without food, water, and shelter. The horrible irony is that Haiti was already suffering greatly as the poorest country in the western hemisphere. For centuries Haitians have endured injustice, and oppression, and indescribable poverty, and now they are living through unspeakable destruction of what little they had left. I hear songs of lament in the air:

O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. (Psalm: 22:2)

I cry out to you, oh God, but you do not answer. (Job 30:20)

...my foes taunt, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" (Psalm 42:10)

And we join our Haitian brothers and sisters in lament to cry out: "Where is God in this mess?"

There is so much suffering in the world. A massive earthquakes in Haiti, persecution in Pakistan, catastrophic tsunamis, Hurricane Katrina, and 9-11 terrorism all stir up a storm of profound questions about the presence of God in the affairs of our human family. The Freedom from Religion Foundation has again asked "How can typical Christians reconcile their belief that their god is all good and all powerful with the heartbreaking scenes of devastation being telecast...?" I was struck this week by Rev. Pat Robertson's comments appearing to assign blame for the earthquake to the Haitian people by reason of a pact made with the devil by their founders for the sake of freedom from French control. Similarly, minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam called Hurricane Katrina a judgment of the United States for the war against Iraq. But at such times of profound human tragedy it is not for us to put blame on God, or even on the sins of humanity. It is a time for each of us to set judgment aside and focus our energy instead toward support of the victims of the tragedy in Haiti. It is time to ask what we can do to help.

Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and winner of a Nobel Prize for peace, once was asked, "Mr. Wiesel, to what degree would you be willing to acknowledge that the suffering that we have experienced as Jews, in all the calamities of our history and including the Holocaust, are the fulfillment of God's judgments forewarned prophetically in the concluding chapters of the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy?" After stunned silence, he answered: "I refuse to consider that." I, too, refuse to consider that recent calamities are punishment from God. I believe in a loving God and to Him we pray for mercy to our world.

It is only natural in times of crisis to ask "Where is God?" Many scholars have offered smart answers and pious reasoning, but these approaches seem hollow and shallow. As Christians we learn from the lives of other saints: in times of spiritual aridity, of darkness, or nothingness, we must not stop praying. Otherwise, how would we know when God's presence becomes alive in our lives again? We learn from the life of Jesus: he himself, bearing on the Cross, the burden of the sins of humanity, facing utmost grief and pain, called out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1). The plain truth of the Gospel is that God has not abandoned us in times of crisis. He is present when his people go through the wilderness, not just in the Promised Land. Through difficult times we learn a deeper level of faith, one that does not remove the difficulty but nevertheless, withstands; this is a fidelity in which weakness transforms into strength and prayers for healing melt into prayers of acceptance.¹

As I wrestle with this question myself, I speak with humility, knowing the limits of my understanding. I won't pretend to have a fully adequate response. The problem of pain and suffering has vexed humanity since the beginning. If there is a God, and if He is a good and loving God, why does He allow His creation to suffer? If God is all powerful, then why didn't He stop this earthquake in Haiti? After the Asian tsunami, even the Archbishop of Canterbury was humbled to say, "Of course, this makes us doubt God's existence."

According to Jewish and Christian theology, something went terribly wrong when human history began. Pain and suffering were not in the original creation. God created a perfect world; but sinful, disobedient humans disturb, spoil, and destroy the harmony and ecology of natural order. The stench of poverty in Haiti is the result of centuries of human greed and oppression. The tragedy of Katrina was that the city of New Orleans was built on wetlands below sea level. These were actions of man, not plans of God. There are so many situations in which we find that such human tragedies are neither explainable nor understandable. In the Biblical creation story our ancestors rejected God and rebelled against His

¹ Philip Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* Zondervan, 2006, p.279

plan to keep everything in harmony. As Christians we cannot isolate the problem of natural evil from the biblical story of sin and redemption. God didn't wind the mechanical clock of creation as a distant, dispassionate observer. The dynamic God of the Bible is a Savior, not a mechanic. And through the incarnation of His Son the God we worship participates in the daily affairs of humanity.

God in the person of Jesus Christ is full of mercy. Jesus' victory on the cross over death and sin represents the defeat of evil in all its manifestations. God sent His Son that human beings may not perish but may come to know that in all circumstances He offers saving grace. His Spirit at the beginning of the creation hovered over the waters, and God is still our faithful companion offering us *shalom, shanti, and salaam* in the midst of our struggle and despair. Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1).

Through our faith we know natural disaster and human sin take place in the interim between the fall that corrupted God's very good creation and that creation's reaching the glorious goal toward which history is moving. God is not only the creator and sustainer of the world: he is its Savior, the one who has put it right and continues to put it right. God's ultimate goal is the rebirth of his entire creation. God saw the enormity of the problem, so he sent his own Son to give his life for us. Natural disasters remind us that it is not just people but the whole creation that has become sick unto death and is awaiting renewal unto life. Paul writes of this as "groaning as in the pain of childbirth" (Romans 8:22). No matter how unbearable it may seem, it is now that we must know that in Christ we have a place in the larger picture of the world's rebirth and renewal. "All creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who His children really are...[And] all creation anticipates the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay" (Rom.8:19,21). Christ's arms, stretched out on the hard wood of the cross, are open to all. Therefore, following His example, we must embrace the suffering world and offer it hope. I ask for Christians all over the world to offer prayers, to give generously and to work as volunteers to relieve the suffering of our brothers and sisters in their time of deepest need.

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Deacon's Column
The Rev'd Dr. Jo K. Glasser
Taking On Something for Lent

What will you take on for Lent this year? No, that's not a misprint, even though we are accustomed to hearing people discuss what they will *give up* for Lent, usually a worldly luxury such as chocolate or coffee, or perhaps to what cause(s) they will make additional monetary contributions. I would suggest we're missing the boat in choosing to deny ourselves something that makes no material difference to the quality of our lives over the course of a few, soon-forgotten weeks. The season of Lent as observed in the early church was not a project that was completed at Easter, following which life resumed as usual. Lent was the season during which those who would be received into the family of the church at Easter prepared for their new life as members of the Body of Christ. Membership in the early Christian church was a life-changing, and for many, a life-threatening, event. Preparation involved study, prayer and fasting, and self-examination under the direction of leaders of the church. It wasn't a matter of "giving up" something superficial; it was a matter of taking on something fundamental.

Lent in the modern church is still characterized as a contemplative (that is, more serious, less celebratory) season, but with an unfortunate self-centered bent: We "give up" things that we know we can do without, or would be healthier to do without, thus serving our sense of personal pride in accomplishing something worthwhile – for ourselves. In the early church the focus during Lent was on the self only as it related to the Body, the community of the faithful, and its head, Jesus Christ. What was Christ calling the new members of His Body to be? What needed roles in the community would these new members fulfill? How would these new members fulfill the mandate for all Christians of carrying the Good News to others? At the most fundamental level, how would the reality of the Resurrection make a difference in these members' lives, and in the life of the Easter community?

Here's a suggestion for something different, and I think possibly more beneficial, for your Lenten observance this year: Take on something rather than giving up something. There are numerous possibilities for things to take on. As a way of organizing these options, we can use the Cursillo formula of Piety, Study, and Action.

Piety: Piety focuses on practices that deepen the individual's relationship with Christ. Included are prayer, meditation, and worship (Holy Eucharist, Morning or Evening Prayer, either corporately or individually). Some possibilities might be to learn a new form of prayer (see me or the Rector for materials to guide you); set aside a weekly time for quiet meditation; attend a regular group that practices prayer or meditation such as Women at the Well or the Icon Guild; or add one weekday corporate worship service each week (5:30 PM Eucharist on Wednesdays, 10:00 AM Eucharist on Thurs-

days, Evening Prayer at 5:30 PM on Mondays or Thursdays, Morning Prayer at 7:30 AM on Fridays, or Stations of the Cross on Fridays at 5:30).

Study: Study encompasses ways we learn about God, His Son, and life as a member of His Body. This might mean individual Bible reading, reading books about the Bible or about the Christian life (see the Rector or me for recommendations), or attending a Bible study (Thursday mornings at 11:00 AM or Adult Education Sundays at 9:15 AM).

Action: Apostolic action is functioning as Christ's hands and feet in the world, to meet the needs of those who do without. The possibilities for action are nearly endless. You could deliver home-delivered meals with another volunteer from Christ Church, or you could help serve a meal at the Salvation Army shelter or the Come to Dinner program at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, or you could get involved with the La Crosse Hunger Task Force at a food pantry or another food program. You could be trained to join one of the Circles of Support that provide a positive, welcoming friendship group for former prisoners. You could volunteer at the drop-in resource center at the Coulee Council on Addictions, or at the New Horizons women's and children's shelter, or at one of the area's Boys' and Girls' Clubs, or for any one of literally dozens of other local service organizations. There is no shortage of opportunities. See me for information about any of the community's agencies or service organizations, or to find out what is being done about an issue of concern and importance to you. Pay attention to your heart. When it aches for others, it's telling you there is work to be done.

This Lent, let us remember our Lord's example of prayer and service, and take on the work of His Kingdom. For this He has called us; as His Body on earth we can

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Senior Warden's Report

John Pederson

I have just completed my second year as your Senior Warden. I have enjoyed working with Fr. Patrick and all the people from Christ Church. As I enter my third year, I think the church is doing what it should be doing. It is teaching the word of Christ. It is a place where one can grow spiritually, supported by fellow members of the church family. The atmosphere is welcoming to new members and visitors and consoling and supporting to those who have been members for a long time. It fosters Christianity as it should be.

From a practical standpoint, it is doing well financially and continues to pay the bills. Members have been generous. We continue to care for an old building and Gary Veldey has done good work in watching over the bell tower renovation. Funds will continue to be needed for our fine old worship building. We continue to work on developing a recognition plaque in the undercroft honoring all those who so generously gave to the renovation of the undercroft. Jake Delwiche says that final plans for that are in the works.

As ever, as I enter the last year as senior warden, if you have any concerns please call me. I am in the office on Monday and Wednesday mornings and would be happy to meet with you. God Bless you all.

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Treasurer's Report

Bob Weathers

Year-to-date through December:

Income: \$298,200
Expenses: \$298,200



Sunday Weekly Deposits

January 3: \$3,949
January 10: \$3,987
January 17: \$3,647
January 24: \$3,719

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A Lenten Emphasis

*Psalm 119: 103, 105: How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

Perhaps Lent is a particularly good time to read verses such as these, to feel their force, and then to resolve to learn more of and from the Word of God. Come to Adult Christian Education each Sunday at 9:15 in the Heritage Room.



Children's Ministry Corner



Sunday School


Sunday School: God continues to strengthen us and empower us to teach the children about our great and wonderful Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We look forward to a brief review of the Stations of the Cross during Lent and then a Children's Service of The Stations on Palm Sunday between the services.

Family Worship Connection: Pray for this newer ministry that it might grow and be a blessing to those who participate and all the parishioners who see God's children and their parents serving during worship.

Communion: What is it All About? A class for school age children has just begun we look forward to learning about communion, getting our questions answered, getting first hand tours of those mysterious places in the front of church and learning the ins and outs of taking communion. The children will be recognized in March for completing the six to eight week class. Class is Tuesday evenings from 6:00 to 7:00 pm in the church.

Children's Ministry—Show and Tell: In March we hope to display some of the lesson materials and children's work in the Fellowship Hall during the First Sunday of the month Luncheon.

God bless you for your continued support of God's children. We are blessed with a great team of doorkeepers and teachers but really need a few more. Please contact me if you can help even four times throughout the year. I don't know your skills and abilities but I know the Lord expects you to use them. If you feel the spirits nudging, listen to it and call Linda at 787-6484, klweaver@centurytel.net.

February Acolyte Schedule		
February 7:	Paige Kartman, Alexis Neader, Sarah Limbach, Emily Limbach	
February 14:	Zarah Augustine, Natasha Sarwar, Julia Ferris	
February 17:	Jack Shaw, Hannah Shaw, Abigail Hindson, Christopher Donahue	
February 21:	Zarah Augustine, Paige Kartman, Brianna Stefanski, Alexis Neader, Joe Cowan	
February 28:	Abigail Hindson, Christopher Donahue, Sarah Limbach, Emily Limbach	

Plan for Camp Horstick

Camp Horstick this summer will be held the week of July 5th through 10th. If you are interested, please call or email Chris Frye (784-3334, or cbfrye@centurytel.net).

Music Thank You From Mary Larson

On behalf of the congregation, I would like to thank the many musicians who graciously added music for our Christmas services. Our Christmas Eve 5:00 family service featured Sydney Neader and Brianna Stefanski, accompanied by Gail Vaughn on guitar. The prelude for 10:00 liturgy featured our returning college students Rachel Bottner, cello, and Ellen Hindson, oboe, and recent graduate Simone Stickler, soprano. What a treat to hear them once again. Jon Cowan accompanied our choir on the French horn in a beautiful version of *Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming*. The choir outdid itself during Advent/Christmas, performing truly from the heart. The Sunday after Christmas we heard not one, but two harps during the 10:30 liturgy. Returning college student and former choir member, Hope Cowan and her mother Karen angelically performed familiar carols. In addition, Lynn Feuerhelm joined me in a duet. And, Hope also prepared the prelude and postlude for the 2nd Sunday of the Christmas season. What a wealth of talent we possess here at Christ Church. We are indeed blessed. Thank you, musicians for braving the wintry weather to make music to honor the Christ Child.

Congregational Sympathy

We extend congregational sympathy to the family of Orvie Wetzel, who died January 15. His funeral was January 19. *May his soul, and the souls of all the departed, through the grace of God, rest in peace.*

February Buffet Luncheon

There will be no Sunday Buffet Luncheon the First Sunday in February because of the Annual Meeting Luncheon the preceding Sunday.

February Birthdays and Anniversaries

Birthdays: Andrea Charles (1), Mandy Parmeter (2), Michael Ratekin (4), Marion Thomson (7), Myra Augustine (8), Mary Larson (11), Adam Shaw (12), Sandra Elsen (14), Nadia Tak (14), MaryAlyce Heslip (15), Marie Lockhart (16), David Heslip (19), Stephanie Donahue (22), Lisa Sauer (22), Mike Kilbey (23), Linda Weaver (23), Stephanie Hood (25), Charlotte Irrgang (25). Anniversaries: Bill and Jane Simmons (5), Mike and Jeanie Kilbey (21).

Dates To Remember

- Feb. 1 Evening Prayer 5:30 pm, followed by Healing Hands
- Feb. 2 Men's Prayer Breakfast 7:30 am; Communion Class 6:00 pm
- Feb. 6 Women at the Well 10:00 am
- Feb. 9 Communion Class 6:00 pm
- Feb. 16 Men's Prayer Breakfast 7:30 am; Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper 5-7 pm; Vestry Meeting 5:15 pm; Communion Class 6:00 pm
- Feb. 17 Ash Wednesday services 7:00 am, 12:00 noon, 5:30 pm
- Feb. 20 Women at the Well 10:00 am
- Feb. 23 Communion Class 6:00 pm

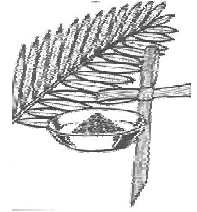
The Belfry

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Ash Wednesday,
 February 17

Easter Flowers

Lent is the Church's great season of penitence. It commemorates the fasting of Christ in the wilderness, His Passion, death and burial. There are no flowers at our altars.

Easter is quite early this year: the Celebration of our Lord's resurrection is April 4th. Thus, even though winter continues cold, please consider now using the Easter donation blank to send a donation toward altar flowers and Easter plants. If you would like to offer a gift to the Flower Fund for Easter lilies, please make your check payable to Christ Church and mail with this form by March 23rd to Jeanie Kilbey, 415 So. 28th St., La Crosse, WI 54601

I am enclosing \$ _____ as my/our gift to the Flower Fund for Easter lilies

in loving memory of _____,

or a celebration for a special occasion, or as a thank offering

Given by _____

