

Title: "The Lord Almighty is With Us"

Text: Psalm 46:7

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Liturgical Day: Day of Supplication and Prayer (Haiti Earthquake)

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My dear friends in Christ, over the last few days we all have seen the horrible images of devastation, destruction, and death in Haiti. Just as the psalmist said this morning, "The mountains have quaked with their surging and the earth has given way."

But even in the darkest of days, even in the midst of all of the rubble and chaos, even in the midst of the smoke and the ash and the dust and the death we can confess with the people of Haiti, with Pastor Thomas, and the with the psalmist, "The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress."

Yes, the images are shocking and they will haunt the mind and the lives of many people for a long time to come. And in the coming days, more heart-breaking stories and images will surface, the death toll will climb, and the questions will arise: "Why did this happen? Where is God?"

Well, dear friends, we have the opportunity this morning, with all compassion, to make it very clear that the earthquake that ravaged Haiti on Tuesday afternoon does not raise doubts about God's love or His existence. Rather this catastrophe of epic proportions confirms the Word of the Lord to be true and it drives us to the Christ of the Cross, who in love has conquered all suffering and death, even the unimaginable suffering and death caused by this earthquake.

Oh, yes, the scientific explanation of this event deals with plate tectonics and fault lines and all of that stuff. The geologists and the seismologists can tell us what happened and how it happened, but they cannot give us a full and complete answer to the ultimate question: Why?

They don't have an ultimate answer, but the Word of Lord does! The earthquake in Haiti is just another aftershock (in a long line of aftershocks) of the Great Flood that destroyed the world in Noah's day. Earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and tornadoes are all byproducts of the Great Flood.

You see, Noah didn't hang out in his boat for weeks watching it rain and watching the floodwaters slowly rise. No, Genesis 7 tells us that "on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day (this is not a slow process) all the springs of the great deep burst forth and the floodgates of the heavens were opened."

It's our text, from Psalm 46, "The earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. The waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging."

The events that triggered the Great Flood make the earthquake in Haiti look like a hiccup on the Richter scale. In the Great Flood, the earth opened up, land masses broke apart and then collided and smashed back into each other (lowering mountains and raising mountains), volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunamis and a wall of water of unimaginable volume rocked Noah's world... ...And the world has never been the same. We are still reeling from that catastrophic event. We are still feeling the aftershocks. And we felt one on Tuesday afternoon.

Okay, Pastor, that gives me a general answer (a big picture answer) for this whole thing. But what about Haiti? Why them? Why now? It's now a hopeless situation for those who had no hope in the first place. So, did God have it out for these people? Did God call in this strike?

Well, good old Pat Robertson of CBN TV fame seems to think so. He wants to place the blame on the fact that Haiti made a pact with the devil some 200 years ago and because of the current practice of voodoo.

But here's the deal: Unless Pat got a special memo from the Lord on this one; I'm not going to buy it. If I don't have a "Thus says the Lord" then what Pat says is not most certainly true.

And his statements are not true; they're blatantly false. The people of Haiti are no more or no less sinful than Pat Robertson himself. St. Paul reminds us, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...and death has spread to all men because all have sinned." The earthquake that ravaged Haiti is a reminder of God's judgment on the whole world during the time of the Great Flood and it is a reminder that the Lord "will come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead" (the whole world).

This earthquake in Haiti is a wake up for everyone. It's a call to repentance for you, me, the United States, the people of Haiti, and the rest of the whole world. God wants all to repent and to be saved. He wants all to turn from self and our sin and turn to the Savior.

You see, sin and evil and death seek to ravage God's creation, and this elementary truth lies at the core of what happened on Tuesday afternoon. However, the problem here is that most people seek a cause and effect relationship for what happened to Haiti. Haiti has done this and so God does this to them. But that's not how it works. Go ask Job.

And at the root of that messed up mindset lies the notion that sin and evil is somehow rational. But sin and evil are not clean and rational, they are irrational. If you think sin and evil and its effects are all nice and neat and clean and tidy, then you haven't even begun to understand sin and evil.

With the Fall into sin, Satan has thrown a monkey wrench into God's universal created order. Sin and evil attack God's created order and the order is messed up. Look at it this way: A terrorist sets off a bomb and it not only kills its target: a world leader, but it also kills all of the innocent men, women, and children that were near the leader.

So, the only answer, the only way to restore order is to "make all things new." God's created and perfect order will only be fully operational again in heaven. That's where the Fortress is. That's the place where God's people are safe and sound for all of eternity. That Fortress cannot fall; for it is untouched by sin and evil.

That's why earthquakes, hurricanes, sickness, war, and death is par for the course in a fallen, sinful, and dying world. And it is a testament to God's patience and mercy that this life and this world remain, in spite of our sin and our rebellion. Which is exactly what we heard in our Old Testament reading this morning, "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness."

Here's the bottom line: Apart from the Lord's mercy, this world is nothing but destruction. That's the law of the Lord. And the events in Haiti of this past week confirm it.

However, while the events of this past week confirm God's word about sin and death, and our sinful hearts use these things to drive us to fear and to the brink of despair, they certainly cannot silence God's Word of Gospel.

And that is the message that Pastor Thomas is bringing to his hurting and dying people this morning: The earthquake cannot change the fact that Christ has died for the sins of the world. The suffering and death of thousands of Haitians cannot alter the truth that Christ has risen from the dead. And no matter how well the devil dances right now, he cannot put the Lord back in the grave. The aftermath of the earthquake and its unspeakable horrors cannot change the fact that the Lord Almighty is with us and the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Don't for a moment entertain the notion that this horrific catastrophe is somehow proof that God has forsaken the people of Haiti. Don't for a moment believe that God has forsaken His people who lie dead in the rubble. All this sinful world could give them was a tomb of concrete and cement. But the Lord is risen from the dead, and He opens their tomb. Even if we cannot get to them, the Lord brings His people to eternal life.

Yes, they are wrenched away from their families for now. But in their mourning, the comfort for those families is nothing less than the Lord's promise: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one shall snatch them out of My hand."

Even when sin, death, and the devil tried to destroy God's people in the rubble of those buildings, the Lord Almighty was with them and the God of Jacob was their fortress. As St. Paul told us in our epistle lesson, "Nothing...Nothing...Not even this catastrophic earthquake and this horrible death could separate them from the love of Christ." Christ has conquered death and because He lives His people in that rubble will conquer death and they will live also.

But you know what? It's hard to always recognize that fact. It's hard to see with the naked eye. It's hard to believe sometimes that the Lord Almighty is actually with us.

Just think back to Christmas. It's hard to believe that the Lord Almighty was there in the manger. It's hard to believe that little Baby in the straw is Immanuel, "God with us."

And what was true at the manger is also true at the cross. Jesus doesn't look like the Lord Almighty up there on that torture rack. He looks more like an executed criminal.

And what is true at the manger and at the cross is also true in Haiti right now. It doesn't look like the Lord Almighty is with them, but He is. You see in the midst of tremendous suffering and death, just look at the cross, the Lord always does His greatest work.

You see, appearances can be pretty tricky. Because 3 days after the cross, the Lord Almighty, the Lord Jesus Christ, rose from the dead and He conquered the power of sin, death, and the devil. The door to real and everlasting life has been opened for you, me, and the suffering people of Haiti.

The Lord Almighty is with us, even in the darkest of days.

But we have to go through the cross (through suffering) to get to the crown. We have to endure tragedy before triumph. That's the way it was for Jesus and that's the way it will be for us.

But the good news is: The Lord is with us, even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we can fear no evil for the Lord is with us. His rod and His staff they comfort us. We know the end of the story. We know where history is going. We know where it ended for Jesus and because of Jesus we know where it ends for us: The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

That is what is sustaining Pastor Thomas right now. That is what is sustaining our brothers and sisters in Christ in Haiti. And that is what is sustaining us.

And so sustained by the grace and mercy of God, we pray.

On this Day of Supplication and Prayer, we pray, remembering the victims of the earthquake, and we give thanks to the Lord Almighty that He has given the crown of everlasting life to those who trusted in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus.

We pray for their families and all who mourn, that the Lord would give to them the certain hope and absolute confidence of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

We pray for our government, the government of Haiti, the UN, other world governments, and relief agencies that the relief effort would be coordinated and made more efficient.

We pray for the rescue workers and military personnel, that the Lord would grant them safety in their loving service to their neighbor.

We pray for all, that against the backdrop of this death and destruction, they might see the radiant light of the Lord who has conquered death for them.

We pray this day—not with a feeling of impotence, as if we pray because there isn't anything else we can do. No, we pray because the Lord promises to hear the prayers of His people. We pray, 100% confident that our prayers arise before the throne of God. We pray, certain that our

Father in heaven will hear our prayers and work all things for our eternal good, because He gave up everything—He sacrificed His Son to hear us pray.

We pray, because God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in our time of trouble.

We pray, because the Lord is with His people and His people are saved from the rubble of hell.

My dear friends, the Lord Almighty is not asleep at wheel. He is not AWOL. He is not a deadbeat deity.

He is busy at work. He is caring for His people in Haiti through your hearts and your hands and through the hearts and hands of those on the ground in Haiti.

He is busy at work. Doing what He always does. He is saving His people from their sins.

The Lord Almighty is with us. Just look at the cross. The God of Jacob is our fortress. Amen.