

31 Sent Out to a Shaken World

“When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, ‘Surely he was the Son of God!’”
(Matthew 27:54)

December 26, 2004—Sunday morning. For most of us, the day was a quiet one. The day after Christmas. Time to look at the gifts again. Time to pick up some of the mess. Halfway around the world, an entirely different day was unfolding. Five miles below the ocean, the most powerful earthquake in the last forty years shook the earth. Literally, it shook the earth. So powerful was this earthquake (new estimates have it at 9.3 on the Richter scale) that it slightly changed the rotation of the earth!

Earthquakes occur when tectonic plates that make up the earth’s surface shift. The plates that move and grind and press on each other will at times slip and snap. Earthquakes beneath the ocean floor sometimes generate immense sea waves known as tsunamis. The temperature and pressure in the seabed increase, sending an energy surge through the water.

The tsunami wave is not really a tidal wave as much as it is a power surge through the water. A deadly wave of this type will move through the ocean at the speed of a jumbo jet. Amazingly, to a boat on the surface, the wave is barely detectable. There is a wave on the surface, but it is not large by any description. A tsunami wave can move across an entire ocean, as the one of December 26 did in the Indian Ocean, in a matter of a few hours. It is estimated that the force of an earthquake of this magnitude is equal to the explosion of one million atomic bombs.

When this energy surge gets closer to shore, a telltale warning sign occurs: the water near the shore will recede, and then the ocean returns to shore all the receding water plus the surge of energy generated by the earthquake. This momentary recession serves as a warning for some, but others are foolishly enticed to come in to where the water once was to collect the fish and the shells, only to be swept away in the onslaught of water that follows.

On Maikhao Beach in northern Phuket, Thailand, a 10-year-old British girl named Tilly Smith had studied tsunamis in geography class at school and recognized the warning sign of the receding ocean. She and her parents warned others on the beach, which was evacuated safely.

As the surge of water and waves comes forward, there is such force that everything is swept away in its power. The wave itself will range from three feet to over 100 feet in height. Along with the vast waves is the destructive high tide of water that comes behind it. It is reported that palm trees were completely covered by water. In the Alaskan Tsunami of 1964, the water rose up a mountainside to a height of more than 1,700 feet.

At the moment, it is estimated that anywhere from 228,000 – 310,000 people are thought to have died as a result of the 2004 Tsunami, and the count is not yet complete.

All of this is beyond my comprehension. Yet, as unimaginable is the destruction and the

loss of life, the one fact that causes me even greater burden and tears is the question, “What of their souls?”

Many of the countries affected by this disaster are populated heavily by Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. What of their souls? The destruction and suffering inflicted by the tsunami is horrific. Yet that pales in comparison to the destruction and suffering that awaits those whose lives have been fractured from God by sin.

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

A life fractured from God. This is what sin does. As with the rescue of the miners from Quecreek, I see a parallel in the disaster of December 26 for our spiritual lives.

The sin of Adam and Eve created a fault line. It fractured many relationships.

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’” (Genesis 3:8-9).

What a sad and pitiful picture that is. Adam and Eve sin and now they are hiding behind the trees from the God who created them for fellowship and intimacy. That is fractured. Then as God talks with Adam and Eve, we hear:

“And he said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?’ The man said, ‘The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it’” (Genesis 3:11-12).

And so the blame game begins. The oneness between man and woman has a huge fault line running through it. The result of sin does not stop there. There is more fracturing—this time between man and the world that God wants him to manage.

“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken. . .” (Genesis 3:17-19).

The fault lines that were caused by man’s disobedience have, like the slipping tectonic plates, released a power surge throughout the world—for all of time. The Bible tells of the disastrous results of sin that continue to sweep over all generations:

“But mark this; there will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Often times, like it is with a tsunami wave, the destructive power of sin is not detected beneath the surface. People go about their lives, engaging in sinful habits, unaware of the destructive power that lies underneath the surface. As it gets closer to shore it begins to surface. It is deceiving at first because it offers something that entices people to come closer. As they do, it then releases its destructive power over them, and they are swept away in its destructive path. The pages of Scripture and of newspapers are filled with the carnage that is the result.

As those who have been sent into a world that is being shaken to its core, we must ask ourselves, “What is our responsibility in the midst of this?” We are not untouched by the fault lines of sin. Believers and non-believers alike can be and are swept away in its destructive path.

It is reported that when the tsunami hit shore, many people were immediately killed. Others ran to their safety. Still others ran safely away, only to return and help rescue those left behind and in danger of being killed. Out at sea there were sailing boats with people on board. Actually, they were in a safe place. As this unfolded, those on board noticed some people being carried out to sea by the force of the tsunami. Some on the boats helped them aboard, while others sailed away, not wanting to be involved and looking for a safe place to lay anchor.

Which of those two boats is Christ's view of the Church? The one holy Christian and apostolic Church is sent with a mission into the world to rescue the lost—those who are drowning in their guilt and shame. In the mission that He has given us, the Church is sent to cast the net of His grace and forgiveness to a world drowning in hopelessness and despair. Long ago, God was so disgusted with the world that we read:

“The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them.’ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. . . . God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, ‘I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; I am surely going to destroy both of them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood. . . . But I will establish my covenant with you and you will enter the ark.’”
(Genesis 6:6-8, 12-13, 18).

It was by means of the ark that God saved the earth from complete destruction. Today, God still desires to save the world through His chosen vessel, the ark of His Church.

The power of sin has shaken the earth to its core, stronger and deeper than any earthquake ever recorded. People's lives and homes are being shaken and torn apart daily. Into this world we are sent—sent with the message of another earthquake of even greater magnitude than that of sin or of the tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Ours is the message of how God is shaking the world to its core. It is actually a message of two earthquakes by which God is shaking the very foundations of the world:

“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split” (Matthew 27: 50-51).

Then three days later, another earthquake was felt throughout the world:

“There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it” (Matthew 28:2).

The Cross and the Tomb shook the earth. More than just the earth, these two earthquakes shook loose the hold Satan had on us. They also shook loose the power and grip of death. The aftershock of those two 'quakes was still felt 50 days later on Pentecost when the Spirit, sent from Jesus, came upon the disciples, and their witness from that time forward would shake the world upside down. The aftershock of those two earthquakes is still being felt today in our lives.

On the day before we were going to bury my dad, I can remember standing above his open grave and saying out loud, “You hold nothing over me or over my dad. You could not hold onto the body of Jesus. Nor will you be able to hold onto the body of anyone who is in Jesus!”

“When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true; Death has

been swallowed up in victory. Where O death is your victory? Where O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:54-58).

Be steadfast. Let nothing move you. The world is being shaken at its core by the fault lines of sin. Be steadfast. Let nothing move you. There are many things that can shake our world. Tsunamis in the Indian Ocean or, close to home, the death of a loved one or an illness. Our confidence in the midst of a shaken world is that the earthquakes that surrounded His crucifixion and resurrection provide us with an unshakable foundation, enabling us to say:

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the

sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (Psalm 46).

Prayer: O God, you are my Rock. In a world shaken by sin, I stand on the steadfast promise of your Word. Kingdoms and powers will tumble but you, O God, and your Holy City stand secure. Yours alone is the Kingdom and power and glory forever and ever. **Amen.**

Challenge: Is there someone in your life who has been shaken and would benefit from receiving a note from you with the words of Psalm 46?

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 15

From the Book of Concord: “This inherited sin has caused such a deep, evil corruption of nature that reason does not comprehend it; rather, it must be believed on the basis of the revelation in the Scriptures (Ps. 51[:5] and Rom. 5[:12]; Exod. 33[:20]; Gen. 3[:6ff.]). Therefore, the scholastic theologians have taught pure error and blindness against this article:

1. That after the fall of Adam the natural powers of the human being have remained whole and uncorrupted, and that each human being possesses by nature sound reason and a good will, as the philosophers teach.
2. That the human being has a free will, either to do good and reject evil or to reject good and do evil.
3. That the human being is able, by using natural powers, to keep and carry out every command of God.

4. That human beings are able, using natural powers, to love God above all things and their neighbors as themselves.

5. That if human beings do as much as is in their power, then God will certainly give grace to them.

6. That if someone wants to go to the sacrament, it is not necessary to have a proper intention to do good, but it is enough for that person not to have an evil intention to commit sin, because human nature is so completely good and the sacrament is so powerful.

7. That there is no basis in Scripture that the Holy Spirit with his grace is necessary for performing a good work.

These and many similar things have arisen from a lack of understanding and ignorance about both sin and Christ our Savior. We cannot tolerate these purely pagan teachings, because, if these teachings were right, then Christ has died in vain. For there would be no defect or sin in humankind for which he had to die—or else he would have died only for the body and not for the soul, because the soul would be healthy and only the body would be subject to death” (Smalcald Articles, p. 311.3-11).