

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
HUMAN RELATIONS SUNDAY  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
“HAITI”  
Job 42:1-6  
JANUARY 17, 2010  
9:15 & 11:00 A.M. SERVICES**

On Tuesday of this week just before 5 p.m. Eastern Time , a 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, with the epicenter just 10 miles from Port-au-Prince, the island nation's capital city. In that city of 2 million people, the damage has been massive and widespread, and early estimates are that tens of thousands have lost their homes and many have perished. It was the worst quake in the area in two centuries. We have all seen the images of suffering and the aftermath on the internet and TV. Electricity and phone lines failed almost immediately, and the island air-traffic control center collapsed, so getting accurate reports was difficult, but people on the ground described the damage as **“staggering”** and **“catastrophic.”** The Red Cross says 3 million people have been affected. One worker for Food for the Poor charity said, **“Hundreds of casualties would be a serious understatement.”**

The presidential palace, the U.N. headquarters, a hospital, public buildings, churches, schools, hotels, private homes and many other structures collapsed with people inside, and rescuers working with only their bare hands and only by the light of flashlights after dark were trying to dig people out, but it was feared that many victims were beyond rescue.

The horrible irony is that Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere. They had no direction to go but up. And now this! Already at the bottom economically and now they have been shoved through the floor. I am convinced that there are very few people alive who have not been struck by the horror of this event. And of course, as Christians we are faced with the same old questions: Why? Why do such things happen? How can there be such evil? Where is God? What can I do? How will they ever recover?

Questions are so hard to answer in tragic times. But we ask questions nonetheless. Our text this morning is from the Book of Job. Job unlike most book of the Bible helps us to wrestle with the questions we have posed this morning. As a matter of fact, Job has over 330 questions in its 42 chapters. And the reason is simple; the book of Job deals with a horrible tragedy.

The Bible says that Job is a righteous man; greater than all others. A hedge, a barrier, is set around him, his family, and his business. Suddenly, without warning, and for no reason other than his being blameless and upright, his family and business is wiped out. In the middle of the business of everyday life two rogue groups conduct a raid taking away Job's livestock and killed his servants, his entire workforce. Then his family is lost in a freak accident when a mighty wind sweeps in from the desert, striking the four corners of the house. The house collapses and all are lost.

**It was swift. It was unwarranted. It was unconscionable.**

What a tragedy! In many ways the events of this past week seem eerily echoed in the story of Job. Why is there then such a similarity between the events of Job and the events of this past week? It is because, even though 4000 years separate the two events, life, and I mean the things that make life meaningful, have not changed at all. Not even over 4 millennia. We all must make a living. We all love our family. We all want security. We all want a home.

So what do we do in tragedy? We do what Job did when he learned of his loss. We mourn. He was silent when he received the first two reports that his business and livestock had been wiped out. But when he received the news that his children were all killed, he got up and tore his robe. Then, he fell on his knees and mourned: ***“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return.”*** In other words, everything that had meaning in his life was gone. As he came into this world so Job felt he was leaving it: Barren, naked!

As the news poured in, I saw images of children lying in the streets all alone as crowds thronged past. Bodies lined up on the side of the street: Dads, moms, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends. We have people in our congregation who have friends in Haiti. My classmate from Seminary, Jim Gulley was there with UMCOR. For days he was unaccounted for, but Nancy his wife received word from him on Friday. Hurt, but alive.

The news has shown us the faces of the people and told their stories and the mourning has rippled across the country. We mourn for every family lost. Every family torn apart. We weep for Haiti. We mourn because of their loss.

Mourning is part of a powerful process. It undergirds our strength and reveals our soul. It helps us reach out in compassion to those who hurt.

After we have mourned, we start asking questions: How can I help? Where do we go from here? Where do we stand now? And perhaps we also wonder: How can we stop this from happening again? That last question is the tricky one. Let's just look at that for a moment.

Job had a hedge of protection. A barrier which God erected but then took it away allowing Satan to have his way with Job. It is the Hebrew Scripture's way of saying that even the most righteous and best of this earth are not immune to evil. Just because we are good does not mean we are protected from bad. Not in this life. The writer of Job understood this. But Job himself could not. He was too caught up in his grief and loss.

Neither could Job's friends comprehend what had happened. His three friends come to him and said, in effect, only those who have done evil perish. Those who are righteous are never destroyed. They thought Job had done some terribly evil thing and this is why he was suffering. God has lifted the barrier to punish you, they said. They were wrong; just as wrong as Pat Robertson was the other day.

I was struck by Pat Robertson's comments. He appeared to assign the blame for this tragic earthquake on the Haitian people's pact with the devil made by the founders who wanted the country to be free from French control. It appears that Pat Robertson has a problem when black people free themselves from colonial rule, as was evident from the Haitian revolution.

But still there are so many people who are ready to side up with Pat Robertson. There are some who believe that the earthquake is the fault of the Haitian people because they made a pact with the devil. God forbid that anyone here would believe such rubbish! But believe me, there are those out there who are convinced that this was God's will, and that God is punishing Haiti for its sins. Well I'm here to tell you that they are wrong. You cannot pin this on God. We must learn what Job eventually learned. As good and great as you might be or the Haitian people might be, no one has an exclusive and closed relationship with God. No one! Earthquakes are natural. They are a part of nature and there are moments in nature

when chaos can intrude. And Satan had nothing to do with whipping up this earthquake or any other natural disaster.

Now here is the final question. Where then is God? Where is God when terrible tragedies befall us?

Job's friends are silenced because they are wrong. But, Job continues to speak. He wants to know why he has suffered. Why God has allowed this to happen. He finally gets his answer when God visits him from out of a storm and asks him a few questions. Listen to some of the questions:

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you understand. Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane?

Job is silenced and he realizes he is only a man, that he cannot possibly comprehend the meaning of the events around him. In the end Job repents in dust and ashes.

Where was God this week? Hear me and hear me good! God was not in the belly of the earth Tuesday. He did not cause this to happen. No, God was not in the earthquake, but I'll tell you where he was. He was there in the last moments as loved ones called out under the rubble to say I love you; I'm not going to make it. He is there in the soldiers' camouflage headed toward the islands on our ships. He is there behind the Haitian trying to find his neighbors children. He is behind the scalpel and the syringe. He is near the heart of all who in the face of this tragedy love their neighbor and turn to God in repentance who in the ashes of these last few days look to him, not for answers, but because in the end tragedies teach us that we are mortal and fully dependent upon God.

**But as mortals it is only natural for us to ask questions.**

What should we do? We should mourn, yes, but we should also help the Haitians rebuild. We should rebuild their walls as soon as the rubble is cleared. We should rebuild their lives as soon as we honor in death all those who have died. We must help them to begin to rebuild their confidence as a people by showing our compassion as their neighbors. And, I pray to God at last, we learn how fragile we are. And our need for a God who is sovereign over all the earth

Where is God? God is here. Anguish is no stranger to God. Let us never forget, what Job could not know. Jesus suffered. He died. But he was raised. Therefore, we have hope in these worst of times.

If you are open to help and pray for the people of Haiti, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.