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Haiti: Unspeakable tragedy – Unfathomable Wisdom

It is difficult to imagine saying *anything* today without saying *something* about Haiti: its devastation and its miracles.

The earthquake in Haiti brings to light the multiple calamities of this Caribbean island-nation. Its plight goes well beyond the earthquake to embedded ecological devastation, economic dispossession, political dysfunction, and widespread social injustice. Its profound challenges are systemic, endemic, and chronic. Even before the earthquake there were reportedly tens of thousands of charitable organizations working to improve its conditions. It is difficult to know now how best to understand and to respond.

In many ways, Haiti confronts us with the dilemmas identified in the book of Job. How can we understand our humanness under God when what happens to us is not visibly linked to some cause that we can identify? Where is God when righteousness seems unrelated to reward and blessing? Or when suffering appears to be unwarranted punishment for faithfulness? Why is there no cause and effect relationship between innocence and blessing? Or between guilt and affliction?

There seems to be no good way to talk about the unrelenting, serial tragedy of Haiti. It is not right to speak lightly of it as deserved retribution, or as the beginning of redemption. It is not divinely-bestowed discipline; nor is it simply incidental or accidental. Categories such as bad luck and bad choices don't fit. It's not like a probationary period that will come to an end, or as an inevitable stage of development, like puberty is for maturity. It is difficult to be resolutely grateful for the profound celebration of life of the survivors even though the capacity to rejoice is one of the daily miracles we see, hear, and feel from Haiti.

We do not want to pre-empt the vital expressions of grief that witness to profound distress, with premature gratitude for those who are living. Yet, in the midst of unspeakable suffering, it is impossible to not be inspired by the incredible fortitude and resilience of spirit so clearly present in the Haitian soul.

It seems what we can best do, like Job, is lament and cry out to God that much of what is happening in Haiti is simply not right. With Job we say:

Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;

I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;

I will complain in the bitterness of my soul
(Job 7:11).

And, with Job, we can surrender to the mystery of God's wisdom and humbly confess:

I know that you can do all things,

And that no purpose of yours can be
thwarted (Job 42:2).