

Saturday "Sermon"

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RainLight

As the ongoing distress in Japan continues to fill the news, many of us are reflecting on the fundamental fragility of life and on the many dangers we all face along the way.

Welton Gaddy once preached a sermon entitled "RainLight" in which he considered the many good things God is able to do in our lives through "bad things that happen to good people." For example, suffering helps us realize how much we need God. Suffering clarifies our values and shapes our character. And receiving the comfort and strength of God in our pain helps us help others find that same strength (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

God does not promise that our lives will be free from pain. God does not promise that we are going to be protected from suffering, or even from tragedy. But God does promise to be with us in the bad times as well as in the good, working in situations that God neither caused nor willed, shaping our character, bringing in God's Kingdom, and preparing us for the Real Story that is yet to come.

Just this morning, I received an email from a pastor friend in Japan, who sent ten encouraging words about that nation's response to their present suffering:

1. CALM: There has not been a single image of chest-beating or wild grief. Sorrow has been deep but quiet.
2. DIGNITY: There have been disciplined queues for water and groceries. He has seen no bad behavior.
3. ABILITY: For the most part, architectural preparations held. Buildings swayed, but didn't fall.
4. GRACE: People bought only what they needed for the moment, so that everybody could get something.
5. ORDER: There was no looting. There were no bad manners on the roads, only understanding and shared grief.
6. SACRIFICE: How will the nation ever express its gratitude to those who have risked and are risking their lives in the nuclear disaster?
7. TENDERNESS: Restaurants cut prices. An unguarded ATM was left alone. The strong cared for the weak.
8. TRAINING: Everyone, including the children and the aged, knew what to do, and they did just that.
9. MEDIA: The news showed magnificent restraint. There was no sensationalizing, just calm reporting.
10. CONSCIENCE: When the power went off in one store, people put things back on the shelves and left quietly.

My friend's church is in Misawa, north of the quake's epicenter. In terms of where we might offer aid, he wrote, "I highly recommend Samaritan's Purse. They have a base camp set up in Sendai and have already flown in 94 tons of materials." May our prayers and gifts be part of the RainLight of these days.