

Water and Fire:

Life in the Balance

Rev. Patrick Stephens

Third Week of Lent

Thursday March 24

Scripture

Matthew 23:37-38

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Reflection

In the quest to understand and explain the human experience, Christian theologians have long separated the suffering we experience into two categories. The Protestant study of Christian ethics discusses ontological and historically situated suffering. Similarly, Catholic moral theology speaks of natural and human evil. In both academic traditions, there is the understanding that some tragedies occur as a result of being part of a larger natural system, while others can and must be prevented.

Ontological suffering (natural evil) refers to the suffering people endure as a result of interacting with our environment. Natural disasters, disease and accidental harm are generally understood to fall under this category. Christians are to endure such suffering as best we can and respond with grace to the suffering of others through acts of compassion.

Historically situated suffering (human evil) is the harm that people inflict on each other. War, oppression, violence, discrimination, and the violation of trust are examples of this type of harm. As Christians, we are expected to confront and prevent this type of evil behaviour.

This way of thinking about tragic human experiences is helpful to some degree. Lately, however, I have been very concerned by a quiet tendency to confuse or conflate these two categories of suffering. If ontological suffering is to be endured, while historically situated suffering is to be confronted, I am worried that our economic and political systems have mutated to the point that they have become like geological and meteorological systems over which we have little direct control. Meanwhile, human activity now affects climate and geology more than ever before through pollution, resource extraction, and deforestation.

The risk is that we will passively expect our global neighbours to endure war and poverty as if these were earthquakes and cyclones, while feeling powerless in the face of governments and industries that seem as immovable as tectonic plates and the weather itself.

PWRDF is committed to confronting both natural and human evil through its humanitarian response program (disaster relief, refugee support, etc.), as well as its long-term development, education and advocacy work. We are all invited to respond to the invitation to work toward “a truly just, healthy, and peaceful world.”

Prayer

*Dear God,
You asked for my hands
that you might use them for your purposes.
I gave them for a moment
then withdrew them for the work was hard.
You asked for my mouth
to speak out against injustice.
I gave you a whisper
that I might not be accused.
You asked for my eyes
to see the pain of poverty.
I closed them
for I did not want to see.
You asked for my life
that you might work through me.
I gave you a small part
that I might not get “too involved”.
Forgive me for the calculated efforts to serve you
only when it is convenient for me to do so,
and only in those places where it is safe to do so,
and only with those who make it easy to do so.
Forgive me,
renew me,
send me out as a usable instrument,
that I may take seriously
the meaning of the cross.*

Amen.

Joe Sereman, South Africa (alt.), “Prayer of Confession,” reproduced in From Hope to Harvest – A Worship Service for World Food Day, Canadian Foodgrains Bank, 2015 and PWRDF 2020 Worship Resource

Rohingya refugees

Nearly 1 million Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic group, are currently in refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar, a district of Bangladesh, after fleeing violence in Rakhine state in neighbouring Myanmar, which a UN official called “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing.”

Naba Gurung, PWRDF’s development and humanitarian response co-ordinator, was part of a team that visited the camps in November for a midpoint assessment of an appeal project through ACT Alliance, a

humanitarian, development and advocacy coalition of churches and church-related organizations of which PWRDF is a member. PWRDF contributed \$95,327 to the appeal.

The appeal is funding projects in food security, livelihood, shelter, hygiene, psychosocial work, and other areas.

In addition, ACT partners have helped to set up learning centres for school-age children. “The Rohingya girls are trained and employed as teachers,” says Gurung. “And the good thing is, for these little girls, kids, these teachers are their role model.”

Community kitchens have also been set up to create space for vulnerable women who may lack fuel or cooking utensils to make food and socialize. Other food projects include food distribution, nutrition education and “micro-gardens” that can be grown in small spaces within the congested camps.

Refugees living in the camps are not able to work, use the official Bangladeshi school curriculum or build permanent structures, Gurung says. The government of Bangladesh is eager to repatriate the Rohingya to Rakhine state.

Read the whole story at

<https://www.anglicanjournal.com/pwrdf-donates-to-support-rohingya-refugees/>