

# The Surprising Ways of God

## Good Friday

Text: Matthew 27:45-56

April 22, 2011 Why? The Question that Echoes from the Cross

Tragedy can strike so quickly and capriciously.

While going about the course of daily life, our world can be turned upside down and changed forever—in a moment—in the blink of an eye.

We experienced that upheaval on the morning of September 11, 2001.

On that fateful day, 19 hijackers took control of four commercial airliners to carry out a terrorist attack on America.

The first plane crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City careening into the North Tower at 8:46 a.m.

The second plane crashed into the South Tower 20 minutes later.

A third plane slammed into the Pentagon in Washington, DC, c. 20 minutes later.

A fourth plane crashed into a field in Pennsylvania when the passengers tried to thwart the hijackers.

The ultimate target of that plane

was thought to be either the Capitol or the White House.

As we watched the horrifying images of the people running away from the imploding towers of the World Trade Center and saw the flames billowing from the Pentagon, many of us were wondering *Why?*

*Why does God allow such awful things to happen?*

*Where is God at a time like this?*

*Why does God allow such awful things to happen?*

I heard some of us asking that question again in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami that ravaged Japan on March 11<sup>th</sup>.

As we saw the images of houses, buildings and cars

being swept away by raging waters that poured in from the ocean and the rubble that was left by the earthquake and tsunami,

many of us were wondering *Why?*

*Why does God allow such awful things to happen?*

*Where is God at a time like this?*

In the wake of such devastation, we struggle to find answers as we try to reconcile the horror of the reality with our faith in a loving, caring and benevolent God.

And even if we do find answers to these difficult questions, they offer us little in the way of comfort and hope.

In the British movie *Whistle Down the Wind*,

there is a scene where a group of children  
have experienced the death of their pet kitten.

They had prayed fervently that the cat would get well, but instead it dies.  
They can't understand it, so they go in search of the vicar of their church  
to get some answers.

When they find him,  
the vicar is in a tea shop taking a morning break  
and enjoying his tea and newspaper.

The children come and ask him, *Why did God let our cat die?*  
The vicar is not pleased to be interrupted by the children  
and their questions about the death of their cat.  
But out of a sense of duty, he puts aside his paper  
and launches into a long, complex, theological response to their question.  
The children stand and listened intently.

When he is finished he wishes them well  
and goes back to his newspaper.  
The children walk away somewhat bewildered.

One little boy, holding his older sister's hand,  
looks up at her and says,  
*He doesn't know, either.*<sup>1</sup>

Like the children,  
when we face a tragedy or a great loss that turns our world upside down,  
we would like a straight forward answer to the question, *Why? Why Lord?*

But have you ever stopped to ask yourself,  
even if we could find an answer,  
what difference would it make?  
It surely wouldn't take away the pain or ease the suffering we experience  
when tragedies wreak havoc  
on our lives.

A few weeks ago as I stepped out of my office for a few minutes,  
I was thinking about that question  
in the context of the disaster that hit Japan.  
*Why does God allow such awful things to happen?*  
Suddenly, my eyes were opened to an insight  
into the wonder  
and mystery of God.

The insight was nothing new.  
It is something I have known  
since the days of Confirmation.  
But as the thought crossed by mind  
It hit me like a 2 x 4 upside the head.  
It shifted my perspective from *WHY* to *WOW!*

What hit me with such force  
 are these words of Jesus from the cross.  
*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!*

As we struggle to reconcile the horror of the devastation  
 with our faith in a loving, caring  
 and benevolent God,  
*it occurred to me that Why*  
 is the question that  
 echoes from the cross

In the face of life's great tragedies,  
 God doesn't offer us explanations—  
 God doesn't offer us a bunch of pious platitudes.  
 In the face of life's great tragedies  
 God gives us instead  
 the assurance and hope of the cross.

The cross is God's powerful affirmation  
 that he has not abandoned us  
 when the world comes crashing down around us.

The cross is the assurance  
 that God is with us in the  
 tragedies and defeats of life  
 and is working through them  
 in surprising ways we may not be able to see or understand  
 to thwart the evil of that which would destroy us.

*Where was God on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001?*  
 God was there in the heroic actions of the firefighters  
 who charged up the stairs to rescue the injured at the peril of their own lives.

God was there in the heroic actions of the passengers  
 who fought with the hijackers on the fourth plane  
 that was supposed to target either the Capitol or the White House.  
 God was there in the workers and volunteers  
 who came to search for survivors and clean up the rubble  
 that was left in the devastating aftermath of the attacks.

*Where was God on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011?*  
 God was there in the heroic actions of the emergency workers  
 who rushed to the scene to rescue anyone they could find

God was there in the extraordinary actions of ordinary people  
 who risked their lives to help their neighbors, especially the frail,  
 escape the destruction of the onrushing waters.  
 God was there in the courage of the workers at the nuclear energy plant  
 who exposed themselves to potentially lethal doses of radiation  
 to stabilize the crippled reactor.

*My God, my God Why?* That's the question that echoes from the cross.  
Even if we could find an answer to that question,  
what difference would it make?

It surely would not take away the pain  
or ease the suffering we experience  
when tragedies ravage our lives.  
So rather than giving us an answer God gives us the cross  
to assure us that he has not abandoned us—  
to assure us of his presence and love.

He gives us the cross as a symbol of hope  
to encourage us that death and destruction  
never have the last word.  
The cross assures us of a future  
embraced by God's  
redemptive and healing love.

The cross is God's assurance that  
while we do not know what the future holds,  
we know who holds the future in his loving arms of grace and life.

The cross does not answer the question *Why*  
when tragedies happen  
that ravage our lives,  
it simply gives us hope  
that God has not abandoned us  
and that he will never let us go.

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<sup>1</sup> ChristianGlobe Illustrations, Brett Blair, ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., 2002, 0-000-0000-11