

Dig the Foundation Deep
Luke 6:47-49

Have you ever watched a beetle or ant or any small creature crawl around in the grass?

I remember one time
reading a book on a blanket spread in the park,
looking up and seeing a beetle
traveling the length of a tiny twig.

As I watched, it came to the end of the twig,
realized it was at a dead end,
turned around and started back.

It came to a crossroad,
where a stem of grass overlay its path,
so the beetle took that turning.
But coming to the tip of its green blade,
the beetle had to once more turn around
and find another stem crossing.

The relentless bug crawled from piece of grass to piece of grass,
tiny legs trekking to the ends of each shoot
and having to turn around again
because it'd reached yet another dead end.

Over and over it repeated the process:
crawl, stop, turn around, begin again.

Somewhat ridiculously,
I felt a growing sense of despair for the tiny, toiling creature –
because I could look out at the park and see the endless blades of grass stretching around it.
How could it possibly get where it was going in this overwhelming universe?

I remembered that beetle and my sense of utter helplessness this week as I heard
story after story of the Haitian people's great need following Tuesday's earthquake.

First, rescue from under rubble,
unnumbered living and dead buried beneath concrete.

Then, medical care – hospitals having been casualty to the quake –
basic treatment unavailable so that even more people died
who could have survived given antibiotics or other basic care.

And water, shelter, the very foundations for sustaining life, gone...

As report after report came in,
it was as if we were all looking out across a vast park full of dead-end blades of grass;
or as if each of us were the beetle who could crawl endlessly through an eternity of human need.

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Perhaps such responses are familiar to you,  
the feeling of possible overwhelm when you look at how much need there is  
and how little ability we feel we have to help.

Or perhaps you were able to jump right into action:  
sending money to relief efforts,  
coordinating with local bodies that already work in this poorest nation in the Americas.

Either way, we have experienced a call to acknowledge this tragedy –  
 not just because we're inundated with scenes and stories on the news;  
 but because, as people of faith,  
     we recognize our unbreakable connection to these  
     fellow members of the Creator's beloved community.  
     The people of Haiti are our kindred in the Kin-dom of God.

And so we know we're called to be with them *somehow* in this situation.

But how? As I said, I sometimes feel like a tiny beetle crawling through endless blades of grass.  
 And to add to a potential sense of overwhelm amidst *this* crisis,  
 it is also Martin Luther King weekend, when we honor the ministry of a man who  
 worked so hard for equality...  
     and, if we're honest, we acknowledge how much farther we still have to go.  
     Not only in racial justice, but in regards to *every* facet where inequality remains:  
 in physical or mental ability, economic status, sexual orientation, gender and so much more.

Which blade of grass do we crawl up first?

Where is the end of it all, our destination in the peaceable kin-dom?

Whether it's mother nature or human nature doing the damage,  
 how much can we respond before compassion fatigue and giving fatigue  
 send us to our couches to escape?

This is where Jesus' comparison comes in.

The parable of the wise and foolish builders – in both Luke and Matthew's gospels –  
 comes at the end of Jesus' famous preaching.

His sermon on the plain (in Luke) and its counterpart sermon on the mount (in Matthew)  
 closes with Jesus summing up:

\     *if you listen to and follow my words, you will have a strong foundation;  
        life's wind and waves will buffet you, but they will not lay you to waste.*

Some will hear these words and perhaps picture images of  
 fallen homes,  
 crumbled foundations,  
 all toppled in seconds by tectonic shifts.

Is it okay to blame the victims in this context, even using scripture?

Jesus was not talking about others here;  
 he was talking about each of us as individuals.

He uses a simile: "you, as my follower, are like a man building a house", he says, speaking in comparison.

Jesus is not talking about this tragedy in Haiti;  
 he's not even really talking about a house;  
 he's talking about our faith  
 and how our faith urges us to *act*.

*This* is what will keep us from turning away from tragedy when it seems so overwhelming:  
our deep foundation.

*This* is what will keep us from feeling like failures when we measure the year 2010 against  
Martin Luther King's dream:

our deep foundation.

*This* is what we can do, right now, in response to God's constant, in-your-face call to  
*acknowledge*,  
not *despair* about,  
and even *act on* the Haitian people's needs:

tend to our foundation in faith, and use it to respond.

With our foundation strong, we can face the world of challenges and fears and struggles  
without succumbing to overwhelm or compassion fatigue.

How?

In this moment, in this worship, prayer is one faithful response.

I know that some of us here struggle with the validity of prayer as a means of support –  
for illness, situations and particularly events of such enormity as an earthquake's aftermath.

It may seem like such a small contribution – what practical support does prayer provide?

For one, it keeps us from settling into a sense of helplessness.

We are contributing to the caring with our mind and heart –  
focusing on, not worry or sadness, but compassion –  
which will perhaps, in turn, lead us to ways to take other action.

For another, prayer keeps us from turning away completely, which can happen when we feel we  
have nothing to contribute. Instead of pretending none of it is happening, we hold the situation in  
love; and this will turn our actions to love.

Granted, these are results that have an impact on the pray-ers life, not the ones prayed for.

But, for you prayer skeptics, what if, without having any answers or proof at all,  
prayer also affected others? What can it hurt to pray?

Madeleine L'Engle, in her novel *A Ring of Endless Light*, describes prayer as "an act of love."

And I'd like to take some sermon time this morning to offer together this "act of love."

Not just for Haiti,  
but all God's beloved creation:  
for Rev. King's dream of justice and equality;  
for loved ones facing disease, addiction, chronic illness;  
and for ourselves and our faith foundation,  
that it may be deep and strong enough  
to hold us through the storms of this life.

Yes, we will also receive a special offering for relief efforts;  
but Christ calls us to more. And so we will pray.

And for those of you who like a little direction in times of prayer, L'Engle's novel also offers a beautiful  
description of one way to pray.

*A girl asks her grandfather, "How do you pray...?"*

*Grandfather held out his open hand, palm up.*

*"There are many different ways. I simply take him into my heart, and then put him in God's hand."*

As I offer each prayer, if you feel so moved,  
maybe hold open your hand, palm up;  
bring it to your heart;  
and offer the situation into God's open hand.

Let us pray:

7. God we hold in our hands your creation –  
we pray for clean waters, clean air, safe habitats –  
and we offer it into your hand with love.
6. God we hold in our hands your people –  
we pray for people in Haiti,  
where numbness has become a way of life,  
and where, now, a hypnotic state of fear pervades –  
and we offer them into your hand with love.
5. God we hold in our hands your world –  
we pray for citizens in nations at war,  
those serving as soldiers,  
all who are using peace to bring justice –  
and we offer them into your hand with love.
4. God we hold in our hands your delight for diversity –  
we pray for oppressed peoples of all ethnicities,  
economic means, abilities, genders, sexual identities;  
we pray for our own actions in co-creating  
the dream of equality –  
and we offer this into your hand with love.
3. God we hold in our hands our leaders –  
we pray for all religious and secular guides,  
that they may faithfully do the work of  
comforting the afflicted, challenging the comfortable,  
and know when it is faithful to do which –  
and we offer them into your hand with love.
2. God we hold in our hands your beloved children –  
we pray for our loved ones,  
whose deepest needs you know better than we do –  
and we offer them into your hand with love.
1. God we hold in our hands ourselves –  
we pray that we may hold to you,  
our strength, our foundation,  
our deepest support in times of chaos –  
and we offer ourselves into your hand with love.

Christ you showed us how to act, how to live, how to build our foundation in this world;  
be our strength as we seek your path today. Amen.