

## Living On The Fault Line – David Kendall

Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; I Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

Where were you on 9/11? No doubt you can remember as I can. It was an event that etched itself into our collective as well as individual memories. I also recall my shock and dismay when I heard one prominent Televangelist say that the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center was an act of divine judgment. He was claiming that it happened because people were really, really bad.

Can you also recall where you were you on 1/12/10 when the earth beneath Haiti broke, breaking most of what was on top of that part of the earth as well? From where I was, I sadly experienced some deja vu when I heard: that the same TV clergy had (again) concluded that God was clearing the land of all that voodoo. So, again, when the buildings collapsed it was because some were really, really bad. Now, it is Chile. But, thankfully, no word from our TV friends yet!

Well, not only is he wrong, he is quite unoriginal. People have long loved to speculate in this way. Some in Jesus' day told him about Gov Pilate's slaughter of people in the very act of worship and Jesus knew what they were thinking: someone was really, really bad. Jesus also knew what they thought of the poor folk recently crushed when the tower in Siloam fell on them: God was judging some really, really bad people. (see Luke 13:1-5 for the story).

Jesus likewise knows how easily our minds go there; how it seems we are hard-wired to utter such assessment of tragedy. When we experience or see some tragedy, why else would we wonder, What did I do wrong?

Jesus objects with strong prophetic urgency. No, that is not what is happening. That is not the why of it. Knock it off! Ok, so I'm reading between the lines here, but what we know for sure is this: in response to these outrageous instances of suffering which squash righteous and unrighteous alike, which break our hearts and shatter all the categories that normally make sense of life, Jesus calls those who weren't squashed to repent. Then he warns that the alternative to repentance is total, comprehensive destruction: You will all likewise perish.

He doesn't say: They should have repented, because as you know they were really, really bad. (And, if they had repented maybe it wouldn't have happened!) So, as a lesson, you must be sure to repent should it ever happen that you make a mistake. No, he tells the people who weren't squashed, who assumed they were basically OK and certainly not really, really bad he tells them to repent.

He speaks to them as though they're not OK. And, they conclude Jesus must not be OK.

What is Jesus doing here? Why does he tell them that when the earth quakes in Haiti or Chile we should repent?

I suggest that the heinous crimes of Pilate, the tragic collapse of the tower in Siloam, and the devastation of the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile all of these reveal the sobering fact that we are living on the fault lines of this present age. (You get my imagery: An earthquake happens when sections of the subsurface earth separate and shift. The seams where the shifting occurs are the fault lines)

People who live on the fault line must do something about that otherwise they are likely to be swallowed by disaster when the earth moves again. Let me explain a bit.

Jesus' call to repent repeats a basic theme of his entire life. In gospel of Matthew and Mark he begins his ministry by saying:

The time has come, God's kingdom is present, here & now so, repent!

God's rule and God's will at work in, among and through His people now breaks into this world. It is gaining a foothold with a view to one day reclaiming and returning the cosmos to the very good condition it had in the beginning.

Another way to say it is: Something is now afoot; the ground underneath us is shifting. All of a sudden it seems we find ourselves on a fault line of the world as it now is. So, it's time to find solid ground, to move to a place that will bear not only your weight and that of other people, but also the weight of a born-again universe!

In calling us to repent Jesus uncovers the shaky, fragile, insubstantial basis on which people & the world live apart from the God he reveals as Father and king of all. When Jesus says repent, he's saying, Can you feel it, the rumbling? The ground is moving. It's time to run for your life, to run from what is shaky to what is solid. The earthquake tells us the whole earth is broken, along with everything on it.

When towers fall, or tyrants terrorize, it tells you the powers that seem to hold everything together are losing their grip; they are not to be trusted, no matter what they promise. Life on the fault line is shaky through and through. So, repent turn and run for your life!

Lent is the season when we are made more keenly aware that we live precisely on the fault-lines of this shattered and shaky world. We consider the footholds we have and perceive how precarious they are. We turn from these and run to the One whose community cannot be shaken.

In the aftermath of great tragedy, of human or natural origin, if we have eyes to see it, we realize that the powers that seem to hold everything together are losing their grip; they are not to be

trusted, no matter what they promise. Life on the fault lines of the present age is shaky through and through. So, Jesus urges, repent turn and run for your life!

In Luke's gospel Jesus begins his ministry by reading Isa 61, and then making the astonishing claim that he himself fulfills the prophetic word. The prophet had said:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (4:18-19†NRS)

As we see him doing in Matthew and Mark, Jesus announces that God is setting up his kingdom. The Spirit is brooding over the chaos of this world in and through Jesus, with new creation in mind, and this creative work is particularly for the poor, vulnerable, and the weak. Jesus announces God's saving work especially on behalf of those most vulnerable when the earth quakes and when shoddy construction causes the place to collapse on them. He speaks especially for those most endangered when the mighty want to make a show of their power by crushing the weak.

In Jesus, God who is king and Lord of all is setting up his kingdom in full and final ways. And when you look at this kingdom of God you see that it turns the present age upside down and then pulls it inside out. Top become bottom, floor becomes ceiling, solid becomes soft, strong is shown to be weak, secure suddenly looks scary, outside comes inside and inside goes outside. This kingdom Jesus brings strikes the kingdoms of this world like the mother of all earthquakes! And it makes sense to run for your life. Unless you repent, you'll all likewise perish.

In other words: Jesus, the Messiah, shows up to say, What you've been waiting for your whole life has come within reach here and now! What good news!

But then as he begins to elaborate, you realize Jesus is talking about a totally different way of living that makes no sense according to the Standard Operating Procedures of this world.

Some examples:

\* Jesus' kingdom is ordered by love, especially for enemies, expressed in non-retaliation in the face of hostility and aggression, and generous acts of care instead.

Imagine a foreign policy or your own interpersonal relationships operating on those terms! Jesus even claims that it is this way of love that will, in the end, achieve the victory!

\* Jesus insists it is more blessed to give than receive. Imagine an economy ordered by that! Imagine a standard of living driven by that understanding of blessing!

\* Jesus taught the way to live life to the full is to lay it down, to give it up, even to the point of death. It is to lose self in pursuit of God's best for others. You take care of yourself, by forgetting yourself.

Imagine the empty shelves at book stores if people believed that were the rule! Imagine the ratings implosion for all the talk shows if that rule prevailed!

To be clear: Jesus' kingdom envisions following him both in understanding and living life in such ways. Thus, the longer you listen to Jesus explain what he's up to, what this kingdom is about, the more you realize you can't have it both ways, or multiple ways. If you're going to live His way, you can't live in those other ways. Indeed, the more Jesus talks about kingdom, the more you see why Jesus urgently calls people to repent, to run for your life, and come into this new way of being human he's showing us. It's because this age is passing away, the kingdoms of this world cannot and will not stand.

In Port au Prince, Haiti everyone is living on the streets or at best in temporary tent-shelters. Everyone. Those few who lived in mansions before and those who lived in small apartments with large extended families all of them now live on the street or in tents.

When you live on a fault-line, you have no more security and ultimately no greater prosperity in a mansion than you do in a mud hut, once the earthquake strikes. If you think your home or your bank account or your connections to people of means provide you security, rest assured when the earth quakes the truth will demonstrate otherwise.

But here now is the opportunity we all have, in the relative calm before the earthquake. We can run for our life and we can run to our life. We can turn from what offers no real security to the One who does. We can invest ourselves in the Person who is even now at work to make right all the wrongs that earthquakes painfully reveal. We can build our life around his solid person and his sure path and plan, which alone will prove secure and provide a future.

The call of the gospel to each of us is this: here and now, on the fault-lines of this world, come, enter in, run for and to your Life, solid, sure, and safe. Receive His kingdom, enter into His ways, become rooted in a kingdom which cannot be shaken.

I am amazed by the incredible witness of our bros and sisters in Christ in Haiti and Chile and I am amused to watch as the news people are stunned when they interview them. They can hardly fathom how the Haitians seemed not to be defined by the earthquake rubble! They don't get it.

Listen to Jesus on this: if your life is defined by stuff, it will be defined by stuff during and after the earthquake. It will be the same basic stuff after the quake, just in a different form!

You're life is either defined by this present age and its stuff which is passing away, shaky all over the place, or your life will be defined by the age to come which, by the way, is already here when you walk with Jesus in his ways!

There is also a word for us as a people and a church, for those with ears to hear it. Jesus follows his call to repent with a story: a man planted a fig tree in his vineyard and year after year, three in a row, at harvest time went looking for fruit. But never found any.

This so exasperated the owner that he decided to cut the tree down. The gardener, however, said, let's give it one more year. Let's give special attention Let's see what happens, (see Lk 13:6-9 for the story).

This way of speaking was familiar in Jesus' day. Israel had often been described as a vine or plant or tree that the Lord planted, intended to bless the whole world. But repeatedly Israel didn't bear the expected fruit. In Israel, the tree began to believe that it existed simply for its own sake after all, the Lord planted us and will protect us. Israel received the blessings of God, but forgot that blessing received had to be shared to remain a blessing.

But what Israel refused to do, Israel's Messiah, Jesus, now is doing. Now in Jesus, Israel has its chance to bear fruit for God. Israel can accept God's kingdom and live as citizens of God's kingdom through Jesus. Israel can participate in the kingdom blessings meant for the entire world.

Will Israel now bear fruit? That was the question Jesus put to his first hearers? Will Israel give itself for the sake of the world, participate in Jesus' mission? Bear fruit?

The same question now comes to us as Church. Will we bear fruit? Will we display in credible ways what God's kingdom is really like before the 21st century world that seems oh so shaky these days? Will we view our worship and service for the Lord first for the sake of the Lord's world, for the sake of the others who are not yet with us? Will we welcome people who need good news in the worst ways?

Even more, will we follow Jesus who brings his kingdom to our world? Will we go to them however opportunity presents itself to us? Will we show and tell others what God is up to in our world?