

John 1:14a

How is your year starting out? Decent? Excellent? So-so? Half-way around the world, millions are beginning this year in the midst of sorrow after enduring a devastating tsunami. Day after day we are shocked at the death toll. 5,000 dead...20,000...60,000...80,000...the count kept going higher...100,000...120,000...140,000. But is the worst yet to come? Disease, contamination, starvation, crocodiles moving in. How bad can it get? At least 50 times worse than our 9/11. Even though the waves of destruction did not touch our shores, the horror of it all certainly has.

Can we watch without interest or emotion? Can we who share the same flesh and blood as those poor victims, pass the whole thing off with indifference? When tragedy strikes, is it mere coincidence that many rush in to help? Even as we watch the devastation on our television screens, we also watch as ships, trucks, and planes loaded with food and water, come to their aid. We see medical workers scurrying to help the wounded and the sick. We hear of nation upon nation pledging millions of dollars to help rebuild what the tidal waves destroyed.

And through it all we hear the questions being asked, “Where was God?” “How could He allow such devastation?” Perhaps you recall the same questions voiced just over three years ago, when God allowed terror to plunge her knife into our side. And the answer then is the answer now. God was in the policeman and fireman who rushed into the burning towers to help bring people out. God was in the scores of people—people like you—who gave money, blood, and supplies to help. God is in the rescue workers—those bringing food and water to India, Sri Langka, Indonesia. He is in the medical workers who are trying to save those who survived the waves. God can be seen in the heads of state who are pledging money to help the victims.

Some are asking: Wasn't God in the earthquake and the tidal wave? Isn't God's power seen in the destructive forces of nature? And the answer is “No.” God does not cause evil. He works to bring good out of evil, but He is not its cause. Sin is the cause of evil. There were no tsunamis before sin came. There were no earthquakes, no devastation, no death. But with sin came the curse upon all the earth. Because of man's sin there are tragedies; there is sickness and disease; there are car wrecks and accidents. Because of sin there is death. Before sin, this earth was an island paradise. Since the arrival of sin, it is a dying world. And we who live in this dying world are faced with sickness, grief, and tragedy, even as we ourselves are dying.

And so the greatest tragedy is not what happened on 9/11. It's not what happened last week around the Indian Ocean. The greatest tragedy took place when our first parents brought sin into this world, and with sin, death. And where was God in all of that? This is where He was—the Apostle John writes, “And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.”

The reason why God can be seen today in the policeman and fireman and other rescue workers, is because, from the very beginning, God has been busy rescuing mankind from sin and the evil sin brings. When the waves of sin rolled over the earth, God was promising to send One who would rescue those who dwell on the earth. And in the fullness of time that Promised One appeared. It was God Himself who became flesh and blood—one of

us—to rescue us from the tidal wave of our sin. He did not drop down “aid packages” from above as we were being washed away into the hell-hole of eternal death. He came to us. He joined us in our dying world. He dressed Himself in our own flesh, so that He would suffer our fate for us. Our human blood pulsed through His veins, so that it could be spattered on a cross for our sins.

God became man so that He could know our sorrow and shed our tears. He joined our human race, even as He still remained truly God, so that He could be devoured by blood-thirsty crocodiles who were demanding His crucifixion. He, the Word, became flesh so that He could taste the separation death brings, in order to give us life in His name. Where was God in last week’s devastation? Where He always is—in His Son, Jesus Christ, who has come to save us from sin, death, and hell.

Imagine our world without God, if you can. In that world, no one would have helped on 9/11. No one would have helped the tsunami victims. No one would have even cared. For God alone is good, and without God, there would be no acts of kindness and love; no heroic rescues; no one who would help in time of need.

But that’s not our world. Yes, our world is sick and dying. But God is here with us, and through many people, He works to bring help to those who need help; to bring relief to those who are in trouble.

Friend, God is here for you. He became flesh for you. He joined Himself to the waters of baptism for you, to give you new life there. He comes through bread and wine for you, to heal your sin-sick soul with His forgiveness. The water and food you so desperately need, as victims of sin’s destructive power, He freely comes to give to you.

Treasure what God has done and does for you, because...you know what’s truly sad about last week’s tragedy—is that most of the victims were not Christian. They were Muslim, and Buddhist, and Hindu. They did not believe on Him who took on human flesh to be their Savior. To lose one’s possessions is sad. To lose one’s life is tragic. But the worst thing is to die without Christ.

What a blessing, therefore, that God is bringing good out of this tragedy. For Christian medics and aid workers are among those helping the survivors. God is coming to rescue not just their weak and sick bodies, but their eternal souls. For the Word of Christ is coming to them, even as they are being given food, water, shelter, and medicine. And through that Word, God is able to save those people from being drowned in the depths of hell. And even if only one is brought to faith in Jesus Christ, the angels in heaven will rejoice over that one sinner who repents.

And that’s why the Word became flesh. He came to save you. You may not be a tsunami victim, but you are a victim of sin. But your Helper is here—God in the flesh, for you. Did the angels in heaven rejoice over you when you were baptized? They most certainly did. Do they rejoice when you are humbled to repent of your sin? Absolutely, yes. Do they rejoice when you believe the words, “Given and shed for you, for the remission of your sins”? Yes.

There is no power on earth or in hell greater than the power of Christ to forgive your sins. And so, dear friend in Christ, rejoice with the angels that God came to save you. He has taken on the tidal wave of your sin, and He stilled the storm. Forgiveness and life is yours in Christ Jesus, your Savior. Amen.