

A Time to Grieve:

We have washed the smell of decaying bodies from our clothing, sorted the files and forms from a Roundtable meeting in PaP, and sit before wooden wick candle burning on a hundred year old coffee table, in our 100 year old bungalow, listening to an acoustic guitar playing a mournful tune, and try not to think of the last week of our lives. A week of terror, death and destruction bracketed by spontaneous praise to a God who secured the night and prayer and chants to beg God's protection and preparation for a new day of uncertainty.

Days ago we shared the terror of earthquake with our Haitian friends as the world collapsed in a cloud of dirt, broken water lines and crushed bodies. Homes of millions avalanched down mountainsides as an already hopeless lifestyle became one of confusion, death and chaos. A culture developing the rudiments of new technology was reduced once again to isolation from communication, hunters of food rotting in smashed markets, and water under layers of dirt and debris. No light in the darkness of belief their world was floating on water that had become crazy. Clinging together we helped dig through tons of collapsed rock and concrete to find nine year old babies and 90 year old angels. Now I sit, having searched and secured the body of a lost colleague to his loved ones, and I weep with God because of a nation in a palpable pain. I don't ask "why". I fear some jerk would offer an offensive scientific reason. I don't want an answer, I want to cry. I want to cry all night.

Once I sat at the bedside of my comatose son, whose skull was broken, and my heart hurt so bad I could not breathe, I could not pray, I could not swallow. This night, I cannot swallow. I can only turn off NPR and give thanks we have no TV to subject me to the negative assessments of a broken, desperate people and those attempting to hold together a gaping hole leaking out the life of a nation. Tonight I allow myself to sit by the bedside of my Haitian friends who fight desperately to locate the lost and live, themselves, through another night. Tonight, I allow myself to grieve. There is nothing more I can do, this night.

I am safe and warm in a cold world. I have the face of a young man before me, asking "Madame, I am hungry and have no money, won't you give me one dollar?" I tell him I have not enough dollars for all who stand with him, uncertain and hungry. He asks, "What will we do? Will the water swallow us?" I tell him, I do not know what he can do but the water is not his enemy. I tell him, "help will come". I will keep his face in my heart, and tell my people, his friends are hungry. I ache to embrace this almost child with a scarred face but take him by the shoulders, and I cannot swallow. He thanks me and I leave with my dead friend.

There is a time for everything, the scriptures say. Tonight is my time to cry. Tomorrow there is much work to do, phone calls to make; emails to send; prayers to pray; stories to tell; funds to raise; plans to make; money to send; buried bodies to find; bodies to bury; questions to answer; answers to seek; and worry to do.

Tonight, thinking Sam; thinking Clint; thinking Jim; thinking Haiti; tonight, I cannot swallow.