



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

Pastor's Update

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925 Jordan Creek Pkwy ■ West Des Moines, IA ■ Jan 14, 2005

By Pastor Merv Thompson

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Cor. 13:14).

2005 has begun far differently than any of us could have imagined. Who could have predicted that we would be responding to a huge crisis in countries near the Indian Ocean? In fact, just three weeks ago I had never even heard the word "tsunami" before, although such a phenomenon was well known to many. But suddenly the whole world has been shattered by these events.

Looking up the term in the dictionary I found a rather sterile definition, "a tsunami" is a great sea wave produced by a submarine earth movement or volcanic eruptions, i.e. tidal wave." Very little of the destructive power of such a wave is even hinted at in this definition. Out of the blue, on a beautiful day along some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, tragedy struck.

According to an article by Kenneth Chang in the New York Times, this particular tsunami was formed by the largest earthquake in forty years, a 9.0 on the charts. More importantly, it took place where almost no-one would have expected it to happen, including tsunami experts. There had not been such a devastating event in that region of the world since 1833, when the earthquake may have even been a 9.2.

More technically, we are told, the Indian Ocean contains a subduction zone, where one tectonic plate plunges beneath another and on that fateful day in late December up to 600 miles of that fault ruptured. The overlying plate jumped upward more than fifteen feet, lifting the water above it and setting off the tsunami.

Ironically, in the past year an Australian seismologist, Dr. Phil Cummins, had been predicting that such a disastrous occurrence was eminently possible. He was in process of developing a position paper that marshaled evidence of past tsunamis and was pressing for an international warning system. Cummins had already been urging these precautions in presentations to scientists in both Japan and Hawaii.

The article describes the incredible nature of the tsunami. After the earthquake, the tsunami travels underwater almost as fast as a jetliner, some 440 miles an hour. When it came ashore it was still moving at about thirty miles an hour and packed with incredible force.

One cubic yard of water weights nearly a ton and so it can hit a building with millions of pounds of force, and that is before anything else is in the water, such as trees, or concrete or cars or appliances. All of these objects become lethal projectiles as they are swept along by the rushing water.

What made this tsunami much more real for our family is that our daughter-in-law is a native of Sri Lanka, having grown up in the northern city of Jaffna. Because of the civil war that has torn apart the country, Ann and her mother were refugees who had to flee the war. Later on Ann and her brother would both receive scholarships from St. Olaf College in Minnesota, where Ann would meet our son Noel. Now they live in Eagan, Minnesota with their three children, and Ann is an executive for Best Buy.

Not surprisingly this tragedy to strike their homeland has been infinitely painful. No immediate family members were lost but the wife of a cousin of Ann's lost several family members in northern Sri Lanka. At the present time another of Ann's cousins, a doctor who practices in Norway, has taken a medical team to the north to assist in the care for the victims.

While it is most reassuring to see most of the major governments of the world stepping up to aid the victims, I think the real story of this tragedy will be the overwhelming response of the rest of the world, from ordinary citizens, from charitable organizations. I believe that Christians are going to make a huge impact in the delivery of care in Jesus name. World Vision, for instance, has committed \$50 million dollars to this effort, and within a couple of days of the tsunami they were feeding thousands of people. They acted much more quickly than the governments.

Overwhelming generosity has also marked the response at Lutheran Church of Hope. More than \$50,000 has been given thus far, and the gifts continue to come. Lutheran World Relief is one of the premier aid organizations in the world and we are pleased to be partnering with them. What a way to begin our year of mission outreach, who could have ever imagined that the first Sunday of this emphasis would be highlighted so dramatically by the events in southeast Asia.

Many people ask the question at a time like this, "Where is God in all of this? Where is God?" Probably the best answer I have heard came from Rick Warren, author of Purpose Driven Life. He replied to this question, "God is found in the hearts of people all over the world who are responding with such love and generosity to these people in need." He is right. In the midst of this tragedy, God is working for good in the lives of people everywhere, even those who don't know Him. When Jesus said in Matthew 25 that whatever we do for his sisters and brothers we do for him, that is all the motivation we need to respond in love.