
Are We Prepared?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
from the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
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With sadness in our hearts, and with horrifying images of devastated Japan still in our minds, many of us began the First Sunday of Lent with a plaintive series of prayers called "The Great Litany." Here at the Cathedral, we sang it in procession, walking completely around the Cathedral nave, twice, before entering the altar. From *The Book of Common Prayer*, page 149:

"From lightning and tempest; from earthquake, fire, and flood;
from plague, pestilence, and famine;
Good Lord, deliver us.

, From dying suddenly and unprepared;
Good Lord, deliver us.

The earthquake, then the tsunami, then the loss of power and water, then the nuclear radiation emergency have rolled across Japan just like one earthquake itself, with wave after wave of tremor and terror. As I write these words, and a few days later as you read them, still another emergency may have developed.

We keep the people of Japan in our prayers. We keep the people of the Middle East in our prayers. We keep in our prayers all those threatened by natural disaster and political disaster. Lent is a season for prayer. And Lent is a season for self-examination.

The news media, meanwhile, peddles both news and anxiety; and their tradition goes back a long way. It was George Bernard Shaw who said, "Newspapers are unable, seemingly, to discriminate between a bicycle accident and the collapse of civilization" (see *The Week* magazine, March 11, 2011, page 23).

Obviously, news such as the earthquake in Japan is serious and anxiety provoking enough; it is certainly a collapse. Still, after a few days of reviewing the destruction, one headline on the television caught my eye. "Are We Prepared?" it asked. The newscasters had begun to turn their eye to the United States of America, and, especially to our earthquake preparedness and nuclear emergency preparedness. I knew, immediately, what they would conclude. "No," they would say, "in many ways, we are not prepared."

To which I respond, "Of course we are not fully prepared." There is no way, in this complicated and mysterious world to be fully prepared for every possible disastrous scenario. When we believe we have fully protected ourselves from one sort of calamity, a completely different one will surprise us. Of course, I fully support all our material efforts at protection. I believe in the work of scientists and good politicians who truly seek the common good. It is good to think and to prepare.

But there are other ways of being prepared, than simply scrambling aimlessly to avoid physical death. I notice, for instance, the amazing sense of order and collective good in the Japanese people. I have heard little about looting and opportunistic violence there; on the contrary, people are caring for one another with amazing good will. Such behavior indicates that

their spirits have, indeed, been prepared.

"Are we prepared?" True preparation involves much more than just spending on physical infrastructure and stocking food and water in our basements. True preparation involves knowing how to care for other people in the midst of tragedy, even in the most unexpected kinds of tragedy. True preparation involves knowing how to live with grace and honor even in the midst of death.

True preparation is a matter of our spirit, and the Church has been in the business of preparing our spirit for a long time. Our prayer, our coming together for nourishment and service, our spiritual disciplines, are all ways of preparing ourselves. Our Lenten self-examination is a way of preparing ourselves.

Sadly, we will all die. We admitted as much on Ash Wednesday, when the priest touched us and said, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." But "from dying suddenly and unprepared, Good Lord, deliver us."

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The Very Rev. Sam Candler