

Week after week it has happened. A buildup of clouds in the west, dark clouds, heavy clouds, the clouds that will certainly at long last bring the needed rains. Forming, growing, approaching. Eyes watch the sky, waiting, expectant, but as ^{the dark} they approach ^{then} the darkness lightens their promise is broken, the wind rises, a few sprinkles fall, and passing to the east, they are dark once again.

I feel like shouting at those clouds, "How dare you do this to me, I watched so patiently, I waited the drops of life you promised, I trusted that you would not fail me, but you were empty, all wind and darkness, but no watering, no washing, no cleansing, no life. I see you now over there where you always are, giving where it is least needed, emptying yourself in the same place you did yesterday and the day before, over east, where they always get the rain.

I have a friend, we took a class together on the book of Job, a class in which we considered the question of human suffering. He had no car, each week I would pick him up at his apartment and take him to class where we heard Job cry out against his ~~friends~~ friends who abandoned him in his hour of need.

This week I received a letter in the mail about this friend of mine. His name is on a list of his countrymen who have been targeted for assassination. A death squad of ninety men is charged with the task of seeing that all who are in the list are murdered. His country is Namibia, which is ruled by South Africa, it is suspected that the death squad is made up of South African police. What has my friend, Abisai done to be included in this list? He has taught in the seminary, training men for ministry in the church. He has believed that God's love is for all, for white and black. He has been a black man, a leader in a country ruled by whites.

Now I speak to you about this friend, asking you to write letters, to the president, to our congressmen, ^{urgently} ~~asking~~ that Namibia be freed from South African rule as the United Nations has demanded. I ask only this because I do not know what else we can do, but I do not want to be simply an empty cloud for my friend, one who might help in an hour of need but who does not, I do not want to be like the friends of Job, abandoning their brother in his suffering. I ask your help.

So too this past week I read that the situation in Cambodia and in other parts of the

world is critical. Food is needed, people are dying of starvation. Who are these people? Many are those to whom the missionaries have come, who have spoken about the love of God, a love that is passed on by his people, a love which brought the missionaries to them. Like clouds in the west, carrying a promise, this message has been a promise of caring and sharing. But is the promise all wind and a few drops, or will it result in a deluge of food. They are watching, and waiting, and hoping in us.

But forget the world and its problems, don't we have enough of our own. ^{It's enough} The rain has ~~not~~ come, the grass has not grown, the wheat is scorched, the wind keeps ~~blowing~~ howling. And if the clouds in the west disappoint us, so do the people on whom we depend. Smiles are less frequent, people with more than enough troubles of their own aren't very good listeners to all of ours. Sometimes someone will come close, so close it seems they may share the burden, our burden with us, but like the rain that slips by to the south, just not close enough. We speak but they do not hear, so we toughen up, talking about our ^{burden} ~~problems~~ in this dry year as if they were out there instead of in here where we feel them so deeply.

It's terrible. One man told me he suddenly found himself yelling at his children, and at his wife, pushing away the people he needs the most because the sky has not brought rain. I'm red, short tempered, worn-out, saddled with the burden of drought that seems too great to bear.

And Paul says, "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." A simple word to the people of God, a timely word to us in this year of disaster. Burdens of a man in Namibia, burdens of starving and dying people in Cambodia and Africa, burdens of a wife, a neighbor of children, of each other. Bear one another's burdens.

And now at times it seems that this word of God to us is like commanding rain from a cloudless sky. Mine are enough we say, there's nothing in me to spare. Today they're hungry, tomorrow it may be me and mine. Let the rains come, let my life settle down, then I'll lift my eyes to see my neighbors problems.

Hear what Dietrich Bonhoeffer has written about this word of God: The Christian, however, must bear the burden of a brother. He must suffer and endure the brother. It is only when he is a burden that another person is really a brother and not merely an object to be manipulated. The burden of men was so heavy for God himself that he had to endure the Cross. God verily bore the burden of men in the body of Jesus Christ. But he bore them as a mother carries her

child, as a shepherd enfolds the lost lamb that has been found. God took men upon himself and they weighted him to the ground, but God remained with them and they with God. In bearing with men God maintained fellowship with them. It is the law of Christ that was fulfilled in the Cross. And Christians must share in this law. They must suffer their Brethren, but what is more important, now that the law of Christ has been fulfilled, they can bear with their brethren."

It is the law of Christ that we are faced with a tremendous opportunity in these days of drought, like the opportunity that comes to parents with the birth of their child, like the opportunity that comes to a wife, as her husband lies dying in a hospital bed, like the opportunity of Christ as he came into our world. The opportunity to live that which is important, and significant, the bearing of one another's burdens. For as a mother's love for her child grows as she cares for her child through the long dark night of sickness, so as we become heavy burdens for one another, then we are given to each other as brothers and sisters. Given to each other as we give ourselves for one another.

Our our God has given himself for us.