

Fear, Corona, Earthquakes

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History remembers a saying: «The Boogeyman ('Spectre') is haunting Europe». To some that meant a threat, to some it was a spark of freedom and progress. Today, some other boogeymen are haunting, not just Europe, but the whole world; literally invisible to the human eye, but much more real, present, dangerous. The threat of the Corona virus is currently very strongly shaping and influencing the world, with extremely tangible repercussions, that are uniting as we all share in this experience.

However, those of us who live in and around Zagreb were yesterday struck by an earthquake that only made this, already grave situation, even more difficult. A piercing sound from the deep and a forceful shaking drove people out of their homes and into the streets on Sunday morning. Neighbors in pajamas, barefoot, with small children in their arms, with big question marks on their faces. We were no longer strangers to each other. We were standing together, sharing fears, questions, attempting to overcome the situation with humor. Each one of us dealing with the situation as best we could. Afterwards, we found out what the force of the earthquake was; we saw images of shattered buildings in the city center, damaged symbols of the capital city on the one hand, and on the other, mothers with newborn babies in arms, standing in the street in front of the maternity ward, waiting for help and a solution to their predicament. I was struck by this image. I was flooded by emotion, as I myself have two grandsons, the younger of which is only three months old. Fortunately, they are far away from the earthquake; but not from the Corona virus. All this is impacting me. I can easily identify with those women, holding their treasures in their arms, trying to shield them from the freezing weather and the threat that's looming over all citizens of Zagreb. I'm a believer. I believe. But everything in me is screaming, "Help my unbelief."

Two invisible forces; a tiny virus and an enormous energy stored in the Earth's crust. We can't see them, but we have definitely felt them these past days. None of those forces is impressed with our strength or power. What's the result? On the one hand, fear as the first, primordial reaction. The first man in the Bible testifies after the first crisis, "...I was afraid..." Life is on the line, it needs to be protected, preserved, but we're so frail, powerless, limited. What's going through my mind is how this situation is demolishing and deconstructing our human arrogance and self-sufficiency in a more efficient way than anything else. Suddenly, we can't even take care of the little things that we take for granted, when just seconds before we acted like we were gods.

On the other hand, the response to the crisis is here; shared struggle, solidarity, a sense of community coming up to the surface stronger than ever. People helping each other, members of the local football fan-club organizing themselves to help the hospital staff to move incubators and other equipment to another hospital so those most vulnerable could be taken care of. It is an expression of humility, because we put bigger value on others than on ourselves; we give priority to others' needs. And that also shapes us.

At the same time, we are receiving numerous messages of support. Surprisingly, it's working. 'We're with you', 'We're thinking of you', 'We're praying for you', 'What can we do?', 'How can we help?' A few words, simple but powerful. It means a lot to me that we're not alone. Many people, those we know, and those we don't, are thinking of us, sharing their words with us, and it's working; it's giving us strength. We feel better, even though nothing concrete has happened yet. The challenge is still here, but facing it is easier.

And God is with us. Wherever we see suffering, he's there. In suffering, he is closest to us, because he understands it in a special and personal way. He gives us the gift of faith to be able to face the challenges in front of us and around us. And of course, it's not easy to trust – because we're used to trusting ourselves – and God calls us to forget ourselves and trust him.

I pray that God will bring order, both in my thoughts and in this situation. I'm learning what it means that God's love drives out all fear. I have a lot to learn still...

We're trying to do little things, and small steps. We're learning that they are not as small as they seem. A lot of people, who do things that seem small at first glance, can achieve big things. Thank you all who are part of our story, our struggle, who support us and let us know that you're with us. Keep doing that, and may God bless you and repay you with his goodness. *(By Toma Magda, Director Croatian Baptist Aid)*