

# FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

## The Christchurch Quake

I was overseas when the news broke. In Peru. Three thousand metres above sea-level, in the rocky, mountainous Andes. We got woken by a text from our daughter, and when we turned on TV there it was, all over CNN and BBC: Christchurch in ruins ... another ghastly earthquake ... people in the rubble ... bodies in black bags ...

Three days later we were home – shocked, saddened, lost for words. And two weeks later, I still don't know what to say, what to suggest, what to make of it all. You'd think that, after 30 years of writing this column, the words should flow easily. But they won't. A torrent of hard-to-believe photos, tear-stained faces, choked-up voices and break-your-heart stories have caused a traffic-jam in my head. And I truly have no idea what I can possibly add that would be remotely helpful to my fellow-Kiwis trapped in the tragic shambles of that beautiful city – especially those whose loved ones were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

For one thing, I feel GUILTY. After all, *my power's still on, my water's still warm, my shower still works, and my toilet still flushes. My house is still standing, my car's not wrecked, my wife's still alive, my kids still have work, and my grandkids are*



still happily going to school. *"It's not fair!"* I've heard Cantabrians cry. And I can't help but agree.

For another thing, I feel HELPLESS. Yes, of course, I can pray. And hope. And send thoughts of love and care. I can give, and give, and give again. But I want to do *more. I need to do more.* I'm just not sure what ... or where ... or how.

For a third thing, I feel CONFUSED. I mean, a tragedy like this, so close to home, raises thorny old questions. Like *'Why do bad things happen to good people?'* And the truth is, I don't know. I doubt if

anyone does. We live on a wild, bucking planet in a risky, untamed universe. And while for most of us, most of the time, life is mostly good ... it sometimes turns horribly bad.

'Acts of God.' That's what they call disasters like this. But that leaves me even more confused. I mean, it's not as if God reached down, drew a red circle around Christchurch, and told the ground to erupt. It's not like he plays games with earthquakes and landslides: *"Hit that house, skip the next two streets, bring down that building, kill those people ..."*

No, a God who acts like that would be a monster. And that's not what we've witnessed in Christchurch.

**I** suspect that the real 'acts of God' were the unsung heroes, saving lives at the risk of their own ... the search-&-rescue teams, stopping-at-nothing and hoping against hope ... the overseas experts from far-flung corners, racing to support us in our hour-of-need ... the leaders of this country and city, talking the talk, walking the walk, and showing the way ... the ordinary everyday next-door neighbours, giving beds, meals, hugs, shoulders to cry on, and shirts off

their backs ... the let-us-cheer-you-up students, volunteering in their thousands to shovel muck off strangers' front-lawns ... the shell-shocked residents in worst-hit zones, showing strength and good humour they never knew they possessed ... the victims who've lost the lot, finding courage to pick up the pieces and start again ... the haves and the have-nots from North Cape to Bluff, opening homes and hearts and chequebooks for their knocked-down Canterbury cousins ...

Amazingly, our worst-ever natural disaster has brought out the best-ever in us. This tragedy has pulled Godzone together like you wouldn't believe. And, despite feeling guilty and helpless and confused, I also feel INSPIRED!

These small miracles carry God's fingerprints, I reckon. Christchurch is not alone, even in its darkest moments. And its cries aren't falling on deaf ears. ❁

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JOHN AND THE GRAPEVINE TEAM HAVE PASSED AROUND THE HAT AND SENT A DONATION TO 'ADOPT A CHRISTCHURCH FAMILY' (SET UP BY JASON GUNN & HIS WIFE JANINE). IF YOU'D LIKE TO ADD YOUR GIFT, GO TO [WWW.ADOPTACHRISTCHURCHFAMILY.COM](http://WWW.ADOPTACHRISTCHURCHFAMILY.COM) - OR POST YOUR CHEQUE TO GRAPEVINE AND WE'LL PASS IT ON.

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## THORT



***Hope begins in the dark,  
the stubborn hope that  
if you just show up and try  
to do the right thing, the  
dawn will come. You wait  
and watch and work.  
You don't give up.  
(Anne Lamott)***