

Thursday 1st June 2006

JAVA EARTHQUAKE FIELD REPORT

Matthew 24: 6-8

*“And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not frightened or troubled, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and **earthquakes in place after place**. All this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.”*

27th May, 2006two days after Ascension Day, an earthquake rocked Jog Jakarta (Central Java, Indonesia) and the surrounding villages. The epicentre was two kilometres out to sea from Parangtritis and the quake measured 5.8 on the Richter scale. These are the facts we all became aware of on Saturday morning as the news spread around the world.

Indonesia cries once again.

Then news began to filter through about the size of the quake and the devastation it had caused. Figures for those killed started at 50 but quickly climbed and by Sunday night when the first team from Pondok Kasih left it had already reached towards 3,000. But again these were still “figures”. Hard to get a hold of unless you had been first on the ground in Aceh or Nias and I for one hadn't.

Our staff was called on alert and teams were at warehouses and in the office preparing to send our first assistance and survey around what needed to be done and how we could help. Like Mother Teresa says, “If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed one”. We can't help everyone who is a victim of this earthquake but we can feed our “1's”. So by 8pm Sunday night we had one van, one car and one truck full of needed goods and people. After prayer we set off in convey and headed for Jog Jakarta.

Day 1

We arrived at the Bhinneka Hotel in downtown Jogja about 4am in the morning and were able to get a couple of hours sleep before we headed downstairs. OBI a medical foundation from Jakarta had already taken over the hotel and were preparing to send out 5 medical teams with doctors and medicines as well as basic food supplies. They were gracious enough to allow us to stay there.

Our team was liaising with some local churches and Pastors. Our team wanted to bring help where none had been given so we set off towards the epicentre of the quake to begin to bring help to the people who needed it most.

The area of Bantul (on the outskirts of Jogja) was one of the worst hit. As we were driving past the houses it was difficult to take in the force of nature that could cause such things. Houses seemed to have just collapsed in on themselves. Death and destruction seemed to

have randomness about it. One house would be left standing next to a house totally that was totally flattened. People were sleeping out in the streets everywhere under make-shift tarps; even people with houses that looked o.k. Everyone was terrified of another quake; after tremors were still rippling through the city up to yesterday afternoon.

Getting to where we were going was no easy task. The electricity is down in many parts of the city and so the traffic lights are not working. The police are sorely overworked with emergency rescue so there's not a lot left over for traffic control. It took us almost one hour to get through one large intersection of the city !!!! Praise the Lord for air-conditioned cars and bottles of water ☺ to compound traffic problems SBY, the President of Indonesia was on his way to Jogja and the crowds grew worse. In the melee were people looking for family members; different Aide organizations, both local and overseas; police; army and sightseers.

All along the road there were groups of people standing with boxes in their hands for donations from passing cars, and signs saying things like "we need help": "we need food": "our fate is in your hands": "we didn't ask for this to happen to us." Each little village had set up their own little aide posts and it was difficult to pass by so many and do nothing.

We stopped to regroup at an open town square centre about the size of three football fields. The army and different aide organizations were setting up public kitchens and tarps to put refugees under, some from as far away as sixty kilometres. While we were cooking mie (noodles) on the side of the road, I went across to talk to some of the refugees.

These people were from the village of Pundung. There are about 100 families in their village and not one house was left standing. Thirteen people from their village were killed and no one knew how many were injured. Bbanyak, banyak" (many, many) was all I could get from them. The army had come and brought them out Sunday night. These people were still very much in shock, just sitting and staring for the most part, seemingly unaware of their surroundings. This seems especially true of the older people. They seem unable to take in what has happened to them. This is the place I first heard the name that the local people have given to this earthquake. They called it the "one minute" earthquake. I was to hear this many times from many different people, but at this stage I didn't understand what they meant. Later I would.

The "one minute" earthquake was "a roar, a shake and then the houses fell down". There was literally no time to get out of the house for a lot of people. By the time they heard the noise of the quake and felt the first few tremors, the next thing they knew the houses were simply crashing down on them. The tremors didn't start small and build, its like they earth simply dropped. That's how they all described what happened, in village after village, and when you looked around it was quite easy to believe the reports.

Some of the big public building and schools that came down would have added to the death toll enormously if this quake had happened a little later in the day when people would have already been at school or work. Thank the Lord for this small mercy that has saved many lives.

One of the first stops we made was at a small Christian village. The Pastor showed us the damage to the church and Sunday school rooms, and we wondered how anyone made it out alive. This man's wife was injured by a wall falling on her and was unable to walk. She was lying on a bed outside under the cover of a tarp. In all the injured people I saw and talked to I didn't hear any complaints. It was amazing to me when I, as a westerner, saw the conditions

of their care. We (westerners) have much to learn from the stoicism of the Indonesian people as a whole. I have learned not only to love but also to respect greatly this characteristic of the Indonesian people in this my “adopted” land.

We then met one of the National Team Leaders who work with our staff. They had been there from the first day, and were doing some medical work. He is a doctor and so along with their team we went high up into the mountains to the village of Waduk Salam Gunung, Kidul area. On the way in we could see not only the devastation of the earthquake but of course because of the terrain there were also landslides and the people are also continually afraid of further landslides as well as a further quake.

Half way across the road, as we were going in was one of the biggest boulders I’ve seen in a long time. It had slid down the side of the mountain and had just missed a house by a fraction. It looked set to continue its slide down the road if the rain continued to be as heavy as it was when we left! Fallen tree branches and rocks were still strewn across the road in lots of places and parts of the road have large cracks along it. It actually looked ready to break off and slip down the side of the mountain. I found myself much in prayer as we journeyed too and from this place!

To add to the misery of all this, it has rained every day, really, really heavy rain and they have only tarps strung between trees for cover. It’s quite high and so it’s quite cold. The old people are especially suffering so it was wonderful to be able to give them a blanket. Their faces lit up as we handed them out and their thanks were profuse.

We set up our ambulance and a couple of tables and got a clinic going. Food was given out, along with the basic first aide. Cuts were treated and bandaged, but the more serious cases needed to be gotten out to hospital. What is really sad is life is very difficult for these people at the best of times. They have very little in the way of Government resources e.g. medical or educational. Malnutrition is always a problem and in the short term it’s likely to get worse. They are already suffering from coughs and colds and associated illnesses. Many of the women began to cry as we gave them the bread. Everywhere we went the trauma was very evident and a little kindness produced a lot of tears. It felt so little to do for them when they needed so much. Tents, blankets, food, houses...on and on the list could go. But I remembered a quote by Mother Teresa (you may notice I like Mother Teresa...she’s one of my heroines) which goes **“Give yourselves fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in His love than in your own weakness.”** So we continued on to help where we could and then it was time to finally leave. It was getting dark by that time and the rain was really heavy. As we were going down the mountain a full blown storm had arrived along with a lightening display just for our benefit ☺

On the way back we finally stopped for food. Have you ever noticed how hunger makes your grace before a meal much more heartfelt???? We arrived at the hotel and were glad to have a shower (cold) and rest. Our leaders arrived about 9pm which necessitated a reshuffle of rooms and hotels but finally found us all able to sleep somewhere by 11pm. So ended day one for us. Thankful that God had kept us and allowed us the privilege of being His hands, feet and voice to the people of Jogja.

DAY 2

Our leaders were able to liaise with the other Foundations that were there and we decided to continue to work with the local churches and reach out to the areas that no one else had yet been to.

We split into two teams and I made a visit to one of the smaller hospitals closer to the quake centre. The hospital Panembah Senopati was originally a 150 bed hospital and at the point when we were there yesterday they had 1,150 people and they were still arriving and being carried in on stretcher by the army. Outside and inside, wherever there was floor space, there were victims. It looked like a war zone. Army tents had been put up in the grounds to try and help accommodate the overflow.

How do I describe what it was like? Overwhelming to the senses? Yes. I kept thinking to myself, "I can't imagine what Aceh must have been like in those early days". Everywhere you looked there were broken legs and arms past counting. Heads bandaged, eyes swollen shut. Cuts and bruises and trauma that was almost palpable. As we made our way in we past bodies on beds and on floors: children, babies, adults, old people, family friends and relatives to take care of the injured: army personnel carrying litters with people on or pushing beds: nurses sewing up wounds or cleaning them: other trying to hook up drips to people. There were no more stands for the drips so they strung plastic rope between piers and then tied the infusions to the rope. Pretty ingenious really. Seemed to be working well.

At one point a nurse walked past me carrying a large and very dirty bowl full of bloody dressing that apparently she must have changed. She walked up to a garbage bin that was already full, paused and then scraped them into a paper bag and sat them on a tray and all this without the aid of plastic glove! There isn't enough of anything!! They are all doing a marvellous job but the whole place is overwhelmed.

Our leader was able to meet with the hospital personnel and ascertain what their medical needs were and what we were able to supply after which she came out and was able to distribute some baby packs to some of the mothers with injured children as well as lovely stuffed toys. I think it would have been wonderful if we'd had enough for the adults as well as the children. Every one there would have benefited from a little stuffed toy and in fact some of the adults seemed to look longingly at them ☺

I found myself wandering through some of the wards and trying to get this sea of human suffering down to manageable levels so I sat with a couple of people and listened to their stories. I will just give you three short glimpses to help you identify with this seething mass of humanity too, otherwise it simply becomes facts and numbers instead of real people, and in the one, you will meet the many hundreds who are in the same condition or worse.

The first glimpse is that of an old lady. Her name is Ibu (Mrs.) Warjo. She is in her 80's and comes from the village of Citro. Neither her friend nor Mrs. Warjo had many teeth left and they spoke more Javanese than Indonesian, but somehow communication happened and I found out her story. She had been injured of course by falling walls. I couldn't understand if they had to dig her out or not. This old grandmother was laying on the floor on a very thin tika (woven mat). She had a broken left arm, a broken right leg and her hip was broken in two places. They had been unable to do anything for her hip at the stage I saw her and frankly I don't think anything much will be able to be done for her in the short term. I can't imagine how much pain she must have been in, but I didn't hear a complaint from her. Of course there is no way she can move or her friend get her to the toilet so the smell of urine was quite strong up close. Between them they had pitiful few belongings and they were just sitting

there waiting. Her arm and leg had been splinted and bandaged but no cast yet. I wanted to cry but couldn't. I gave her my bottle of drinking water. It was all I could think to do. She looked up at me and smiled and took it and held it close to her breast. I left as the tears wouldn't hold back anymore.

Then I wondered past the emergency room. That seemed a misnomer at that point as the whole hospital was an emergency room! On the floor was a little girl of about ten. A nurse was working on her leg; it looked like they were trying to get a splint on it. Her father was sitting on the floor beside her and he was cradling her head and trying to comfort her. She was looking off into space with such a look of pain on her face but the really awful thing was how quiet she was.....all the unshed tears behind her eyes and all the trauma of her young life hung there behind those eyes and the silence.

The last glimpse is from the last village we visited yesterday. They were way off the beaten track and had received no help up to this point. It turned out to be a Christian village called Sragan. Almost every house in this village was flat to the ground. There were many injured here. Cuts, scrapes and breaks. One person they had managed to get out, it sounds like this person had a broken back when a wall caved in on him. But the one I want to introduce you to is a little boy. He is about eight or nine years old. He was too shy to give me his name. His face was all grazed up and especially his lips with a really deep gouge in his bottom lip. He had a cut on the back of his head and had such deeply sad eyes. We couldn't manage to coax a smile out of him at all. He just hid behind his mum. As we were getting into the car I saw one last stuffed toy, a beautiful little puppy. I said, "I know who that belongs to." We ran back (yes, literally) and found our little boy and gave him the puppy. He took it and looked up with those big brown eyes. The smile didn't get to his face, and who knows with those lips it could have been too painful to try, but I think I saw a sparkle in his eyes.

These are just three. There were so many more. His mother, who just cried and cried on my shoulder from the shock and trauma. They had nothing left. Our small acts of kindness almost undid her. There were the old people who when they received their blankets kissed our hands and looked into our eyes to express something that is difficult to express in words only. Then there were the mothers with children who received milk for their babies and Softex for the ladies (if you are a lady you won't need this explained and if you are a guy it doesn't really matter 😊) Then there was the village head, who when he tried to thank us kept choking up and couldn't hold back the tears. It's one thing to see a woman cry and quite another to see a man cry and especially in this culture. We were able to tell them that our ambulance would come the next day and take the injured to hospital and treat some of the less serious cases. We promised to send them more food and medicines as well as blankets and other things they need.

This village seemed to be one that God especially had brought us to. We are going "wide" in the sense of helping many villages with basic emergency relief, but it seems like God is calling us to also go "deep" with this village. We hope to be able to find sponsors to help us to rebuild the houses in the village.

We are also planning to send Samaritan Purse Boxes to not only this village but to many of the villages we went to yesterday (we went to 5 and our other team went to quite a few). "These children need something, and you wait and see the way their faces will light up when they receive the boxes."

We came back to Surabaya last night and arrived at 12.30am. The truck came back with us. We are buying a truck load to send to Jogja. There were no blankets left to buy there or in the surrounding cities. We will also be sending trucks back with medical supplies and various other items from our warehouses.

As our leader is fond of saying, we are prepared of God like Joseph in the Old Testament. God filled Joseph's warehouses with grain against the time of famine. God has filled the warehouses of our organisation against such a time as this.

You, our sponsors and donors have been and continue to be a part of the marvellous plans of God, who before the crisis happens, has already been preparing the way. WE are your hand and feet here. We are you voice and your smiling faces as we come bearing the products that you have sent. When you send us money to buy rice and blankets, we are your love in action to those who need it most and those whom God loves. Without you we are "feet" with no soles on our shoes! Without us you don't have the hands and feet. Together we show the beauty of a wonder working and loving Father who cares for all of His children.

Thank you for your help, love, care and prayers.

Lynn O'Brien
Surabaya, Indonesia

News Flash:

Just to hand last night. Two more earthquakes have rocked Indonesia. One in Padang, Sumatera and one in Papua. Both registered 6.0 on the Richter scale. Waiting for further new to come to hand!

JOGJA: Death Toll in Jogja now standing at 5,400 but expected to continue to rise as there are still many bodies trapped under rubble. 10,000 injured at last count.