

The typhoon

By [Eric Atcheson](#)

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My gaze flickers up from the page upon which I have been writing furiously for an hour, in the fleeting and vain hope that there might be something left that is vaguely of the Spirit in my weak, hollowed-out shell of a body for my Sunday message.

My eyes look up out the window, and I see the trees begin to bend and buckle under the might of the gales that the meteorologists, the newscasters, that everyone, even, it seems, God Almighty, told us were a-comin'. The rain pounds upon the deck, the clouds roll and roil over the horizon, and I wonder what will come next.

But then the eye of the remnants of [Typhoon Songda](#) passes over. Calm reigns. The sun even peeks out to make its presence known.

Yet wood of all manner is splintered and shattered on the sidewalks. Some of it has come down from the trees. Some of it is from the remains of the signs of the campaigns of local politicians all vying for our vote in a few weeks' time. But they are, and remain, the general limit of the destruction of a force that we were told would be much greater, far more fearsome, and terribly more cataclysmic than what ultimately came to our homes.

Meanwhile, half a hemisphere away, thousands of souls in Haiti are mourning their dead in the wake of Hurricane Matthew. Dozens of families in the United States are doing the same. Also from a typhoon: a hurricane. The words are different, but the fundamental nature of the phenomena is the same.

I know not why I was spared from the worst of a storm that we were all told would be greater than it was. But I have some inkling of an idea of why I was spared and why hundreds of Haitian lives were not.

It is not so simple to just say that I won the birth lottery of the world, although I did. It is not so simple to just say that my country's neighbors, both near like Haiti and far like, say, Angola or South Africa, have been ill-served by not only their own leaders but by the world, although they have been. And it is not so simple to just say

that the grace of the one true God somehow saw fit to spare an acerbic, scotch-swilling crank of a pastor on the West Coast while consigning so many souls just a few time zones away to death in a virtually identical meteorological event.

Oh no, simplicity is a luxury I can hardly afford right now. No, it must be complexity.

Amid the calm of the typhoon's eye, I can feel the fire kindling within my heart. What is so simple—so very, very simple—to say is that if the people of a country like Haiti, or Angola, or any of countless other places where poverty claims such a substantial number of lives, is that if the people in Haiti had what I have—a sturdy home with a roof and a foundation, built to survive at least some manner of extremity—Matthew's bloodshed would have been far less.

More people would have lived, full stop. And that they did not is not a testament to the brutal nature of chance, of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, of it just being the time that your number got called.

Oh no. Like I said, simplicity is a luxury that I can hardly afford. And it is one that we can hardly afford. What we chalk up, at least outwardly, to chance, is anything but. It was not mere chance that hundreds died in Haiti while my I marvel at the lack of destruction in my home. It was, and is, something much more than that.

Of course the world is capricious. It has always been thus and will always be thus. The scriptures say in Ecclesiastes that the battle is not for the strong, nor the race for the swift, for time and chance happens to them all.

But the world's fickleness does not absolve us of our own global-sized culpability. It is no accident that the greatest of death tolls in natural disasters so often seem to occur in places more impoverished than others. It is no coincidence, no cosmic chance of fate.

It is because our own iniquities and inequalities remain in a world so fragile and shakily held together that a gust of wind, whether from the big bad wolf of children's fairy tales or from a Category Five cyclone, can rend apart the so carefully built and assiduously put together life of an entire family, an entire city, an entire community.

Put bluntly, if I had less, and my fellow children elsewhere had more, these natural disasters would be both less natural—on account of (hopefully) less change to the climate—and less disastrous.

I have taken one small step towards that nascent pipe dream: I made a small donation to Doctors Without Borders/Medicins Sans Frontieres for Hurricane Matthew relief efforts. I would humbly ask you to do the same.

It won't be enough. I can promise you that. But in the divinely ordained work of kingdom building, it may well lay a brick or two.

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