

The Storm Home

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Psalm 46; Mark 4:35-41

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In 1989 at a baseball game in San Francisco, Candlestick Park shook with tremors from the earth. The game was stopped. Suddenly priorities were altered. Will Clark, the Giants first baseman, looked up in the stands to try to find his wife and children. A California physician said, “Everyone there felt the earth move.” A five year old girl said to her mother: “Mommy, this isn’t supposed to happen. When is it going to stop?” *Terra firma* was no longer *terra firma*.

When Hurricane Hugo roared up from Charleston in 1989 it ravaged this part of the state with its hurricane force wind and rain. Hurricanes were supposed to lose most of their strength as they moved inland. This isn’t supposed to happen? Now here came Florence aided by global warming and rising seas.

On September 11, 2001 we watched with horror and disbelief as two passenger planes flew into the Trade Towers causing them to disintegrate with 3,000 people inside. This isn’t supposed to happen. On the Sunday after 9/11 my church and churches across the country read Psalm 46:

God is our refuge and strength
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear
though the earth should change
though the mountains shake
in the heart of the sea.

And as we began worship we sang Martin Luther's great hymn based on Psalm 46:

A mighty fortress is our God
a bulwark never failing,
a present help amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.

We sang it with tears in our eyes and lumps in our throats.

Of course we have our personal storms as well. Your spouse dies, or horror of horrors, your child. Your marriage is in deep trouble. The doctor speaks the word "cancer." You lose your job. Here comes bankruptcy. You are experiencing the storm in the brain of depression. In the words of the play *Green Pastures*, "Everything nailed down is coming loose."

In one of Garrison Keillor's stories from Lake Wobegon, he tells the story of his boyhood "storm-home." The principal of the school, Mr. Detman, fearful of a winter blizzard during the school day, assigned each student from the outlying parts of the county a "storm-home" in town, near the school. If a blizzard struck during school hours, each child was to go to their storm-home. Here is how Keillor told the story through his boyhood eyes: My storm home, he tells,

...was the Kloeckles', an old couple who lived in a little green cottage by the lake...It looked like the home of the kindly old couple that children lost in the forest suddenly came upon in a clearing and know they are lucky to be in a story with a happy ending...I imagined that the Kloeckles had personally chosen me as their storm-child because they liked me. "Him", they had told Mr. Detman. "In the event of a blizzard, we want that boy! The skinny one with the thick glasses."

No blizzard came during the school hours that year. All the snow storms were convenient evening or weekend ones, and I never got to stay with the Kloeckles, but they were often in my thoughts, and they grew large in my imagination. My Storm Home. Blizzards aren't the only storms and not the worst by any means. I could imagine worse things. If the worst should come, I could go to the Kloeckles and knock on their door. "Hello", I'd say. "I'm your storm child."

“Oh, I know”, she’d say. “I was wondering when you’d come. Oh, it’s good to see you. How would you like a hot chocolate and an oatmeal cookie?”

We’d sit at the table. “Looks like this storm is going to last awhile”, she’d say.

“Yes”

“Terrible storm. They say it’s going to get worse before it stops. I just pray for anyone who’s out there.”

“Yes.”

“But we’re so glad to have you. I can’t tell you. Carl! Come down and see who’s here.”

“Is it the storm child?”

“Yes! Himself in the flesh.”

God is our storm-home and our strength, a bulwark never failing. Like a kindly couple who’ve picked you out to be their storm child is our God, A storm-home never failing.

Our God is our home in the storm, and we as a church can be a storm-home to each other in the midst of life's worst storms. Even more, we can be a storm-home for those in our community looking for a place to be when the storms come.

When you're buffeted by life's storms, Grace is the place to be!

We recently offered the use of our building to a transsexual group in town. A home in the storm. LGBTQ youth need a storm-home in Statesville, as do their families.

Sometimes when life has beaten you up or come at you hard, or when you encounter great suffering in the world, your theology begins to change. Black and white answers no longer apply. You are living the questions. Grace Baptist can be a storm-home for those whose theology is in transition. Come join us in our journey of faith we say, come with all your questions and fears. We will make our journey together.

When Roger Williams, the founder of the Baptist movement in America, was cast out of the Massachusetts Bay Colony he went to what is now Providence, Rhode Island and founded Rhode Island as a colony of religious freedom. People of all faiths could come there and escape persecution. The first Jewish synagogue in America was founded there. Williams called Rhode Island a safe haven for those "distressed of conscience." A "Storm Home." Church can be that too, a

support for people to live where conscience leads, a place for people who because of what they believe or who they are need an advocate and a home in the storm.

III

When Jesus and the disciples were on the Sea of Galilee in their little boat, a great storm arose, and their boat began to take on water. The disciples were terrified. Jesus was sound asleep in the stern of the boat, his head on a pillow.

His disciples woke him up and said, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” “God, do you not care?” You may have been there in your life. To an excruciating degree this was Eli Wiesel’s cry after the Holocaust: Where are you God? Do you not care?

Jesus awoke, the text says and rebuked the wind and said to the sea: “Peace! Be still!” And the storm ceased and there was a great calm.

Has this ever happened to you *internally*? The wind and the rains in your heart and mind calmed? If so, we should join in wonder with the crowd in the story and say, “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?”

IV

When the storm was calmed Jesus turned to the disciples and said, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” It seems to me that he was being a little tough

on them! They might have said, “That’s easy for you to say. You can walk on water!”

But I think the important challenge to us in his words is this: *Do you live out of your faith or out of your fear?*

I think it is a choice we make every day of our lives—and not an easy one. Fear so often grips our hearts. It becomes bigger sometimes than the thing we fear. When President Franklin Roosevelt said to the nation during the Great Depression, “We have nothing to fear but fear itself”, he was making the same point: Sometimes fear itself is the biggest enemy we face. Our minds and hearts, our imagination can get carried away with fear.

Fear can grip a nation too. There is so much fear and anger about in our country today. Anne Lamott says, “Courage is fear that has said its prayers.” We need a lot of those kinds of prayers today. It can be so destructive to act out of fear. So, again the question, Will we live out of our fear or out of our faith?

Most churches I know live with some anxiety about their future. Faith is the antidote. For churches, faith is living out of your deepest convictions and truest calling, then trusting the future into God’s hands. Jesus’ words are important for every church I know: “Fear not, little flock, for it is God’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32). If we seek the kingdom, pray for the kingdom’s

coming, enter the kingdom and let it enter us, if we live out of the kingdom's presence in our midst, our fears will be calmed. Our questions move from, "What will happen to us?" to "What is God calling us to be and to do at this point in our church's life?"

V

Henri Nouwen, the great spiritual writer, has given us a wonderful image of the spiritual life. The great spiritual goal for us all, he writes, is to move from "the house of fear" to "the house of love."

I think this is so. It does not happen easily or quickly, and sometimes we move back in the other direction, but how important it is to leave the house of fear and enter the house of love. What if we woke every morning and prayed, "Lord, help me this day live in your house of love rather than the house of fear."

The epistle of John says: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." (I John 4:18). He's talking about *God's* perfect love here, not our human wobbly love. So it is for God's love we pray, that our house and the church house may be a house of love, not a house of fear.

God is our storm home, and God calls us to be a storm home for each other and for others, where we can say, "Come in out of the storm and dwell with us in God's vast house of love."