

## Preparing for the Storm

Sept 18, 2011

Luke 22:7-20

Theme: Our Faith helps us prepare for the storms of life and our community of faith stands with us.

There will be a storm.

There has already been a storm. Here and in Ringgold, and Alabama and Mississippi and Louisiana and Florida and the eastern coast and Haiti and Japan. There are hurricanes and tornados and fires and earthquakes and tsunamis. Storms are part of our world. But, there are things that you can do to prepare for the storm.

Remember the Scout motto- Be **prepared**, and John the Baptist quoting Isaiah **'Prepare** the way of the Lord and in John 14 Jesus saying 'I go to **prepare** a place for you'

We are individuals- some planned for what they would wear this morning; others pulled something out of the closet as you walked out the door.

As a nation we have put a lot of time, money and effort into preparation and planning. In many ways both 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina have been wakeup calls for our country. We know that we both have to prepare for the storm, and for the response after the storm.

My husband Dennis previously worked as the GA Health emergency director for the state of GA- making sure that firefighter and paramedic and police emergency plans integrated with that of the healthcare system. This is big business with portable hospitals and pharmaceutical stockpiles and emergency vehicles, and finding ways to manage volunteers and facilities.

Storms have come before- hurricanes tossing waters on our coasts, and filling our streets, blowing tops off homes, indiscriminately throwing debris across the landscape. Cracking trees competing with the roar of thunder, lightening brightens our skies as the lights go out. Being no judge of persons, the things of our very lives disintegrate around us in a storm.

We have had some devastating storms earlier this year- across Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. In a Southern Living article a few months ago, 'What stands in a storm, Rick Bragg wrote, "We have learned that in times of trouble, the very things that seem to tear our world apart also reveal what hold us together." – he suggests Southern survival shows in faith, food, and fellowship. Our faith, eating together- a communion of sorts. Faith, food fellowship.

Rick says "As Southerners, we know that a man with a chain saw is worth 10 with a clipboard, that there is no hurt in this world, even in the storm of the century, that

cannot be comforted with a casserole, and that faith in the hereafter or in neighbors who help you through the here and now, cannot be knocked down.”

After the storm that damaged his house, he tells of neighbor checking in on neighbors, of people pulling blue tarps over the roofs of people they didn't know, others with chain saws dragging limbs from the roads. People sharing what they had with whoever was in need. Food poured in- from restaurants, while Locals barbequed food from defrosting freezers. Food was trucked in from all over. One of the workers said that it was like the loaves and fishes- no matter how much they cooked, there was always plenty left. Peoples' question was 'How can I help?' as people drew together, sharing what they had, giving, preparing, working.

Three days after Easter the town of Smithville Mississippi was devastated by a storm, as well as Smithville Baptist Church – except one stained glass window, almost untouched: the image of Christ, with his arms outstretched- propped up like a beacon saying- I am with you always, even in the storm.

People pull together after a storm. That is what we do- as a people and as a Church. Right here at Sam Jones folks went up to work at Ringgold and in the area around here to clean up after the spring storms. Our North GA Conference of the United Methodist Church trains people for disaster response and we are working on putting a team together here at Sam Jones, one of the ways for us to serve. UMCOR- United Methodist Committee on Relief, partners with people to provide relief around the world, with 100% of the donations received going for their programs.

But, there are storms and there are storms. Sometimes there are storms called perfect storms- A *perfect storm* is an expression that describes an event where **a rare combination of circumstances will aggravate a situation drastically**. It can happen when warm air from a low-pressure system coming from one direction, meets a flow of cool dry air comes from a high pressure area, and tips with moisture from a tropical storm, creating an unexpectedly dramatic storm.

In our lives, a perfect storm could be when it everything works together to make things not work. When you say it can't get any worse, and then it does. You pay a child's tuition and the car breaks down and then because of the intense heat or cold, your utility bill doubles. Then someone falls, or loses their job or a dreaded diagnosis comes. And things begin to unravel. The storm overtakes us.

How can we prepare for the storms? Planning and doing to optimize our circumstances, our health, our finances, our relationships, our faith. Look at 'ready.gov' on- line for information on preparing your family and your home for the storms. Then quit putting off those things we mean to do.

\*Like keeping our homes up: When we had the heavy rains a couple weeks ago, my son who lives in Birmingham had to climb up an extension ladder to the second story in a

torrential downpour to pull water logged leaves out of the clogged gutter, because water was running down the house, into the basement. He had meant to do it before.

Think ahead: Don't find out the batteries in your flashlights are dead after the lights go out.

\*Be healthy: Have life insurance and health insurance. Get your physical exams and tests. Workout to be in good condition.

\*Build relationships: remember relationships need care. Rough spots occur within marriages and with our kids. Tension makes them worse. Work on them before the storms. Go for counseling or on a marriage retreats to strengthen your marriage, strengthen your relationship with your children.

\*Financial preparedness- Get your finances in order. Financial stress is the primary strain on marriages. Take a class like the Financial Peace University that we have offered here. Have an emergency fund. Make a plan so to not be caught short.

If not, one unexpected gust can topple our house of cards.

Some people right here are going through that. 'Preparing' doesn't mean there won't be storms, but it can help decrease the damage.

\*Belong to a church- join, if you haven't joined. Sam Jones will have new member classes and a join Sunday in October. Joining the church signifies participation and responsibility, but also gives you a place that is home. Homer said I could share his story with you. When Homer Sewell and his beloved wife Marti, joined Sam Jones here the beginning of August- he had no idea that he would be grieving her death from a car accident a few weeks later. But having joined here has given him a family to stand behind him and gather around him to grieve with him. Be part of this. The things that we do as the Church- eating together, fellowship, visiting, pray with, study together, serve- strengthens us and our relationships with others here, so that we don't stand alone when the storms occur.

These are things that help you prepare for the storm. The storms will come, we can't avoid them, but we do what we can to prepare.

Our scripture for today tells us about Jesus preparing. Preparing for the storm, preparing disciples for the storm, that he knew would occur: in the next hours and days, in the years and centuries- as people have come together as the Church to stand up to evil in the world.

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Jesus knows how we needed to be together- sustained by our faith, food and fellowship. So even before what we call the official beginning of the Church, on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down as tongues of fire, Jesus was preparing disciples. Because- he knew that there would be a storm. He knew that they and we would need ways to hold together and stand strong. As he lived with his disciples he taught them and showed them how to live, he pronounced Peter as the rock upon which the Church would be built.

And he taught us a way to remember. On the evening of the Passover feast, the celebration that remembered God's mighty act of saving the Israelites and their children,

as God led them out of Egypt toward the Promised Land- Jesus said, “Do This in Remembrance of me.” He knew that this sacramental act, full of the saving grace of God remembered in the Passover feast, would prepare the disciples for what was to come. Jesus gathered them together around a table: faith, food and fellowship. And with that bread and with that cup he prepared them and us for what is to come.

So we remember Jesus and his saving act, and the grace of God, when we fellowship together in faith through the power of the Holy Spirit, around the table at the Lord’s Supper. In this Jesus not only prepared us for what comes, but how to respond to it as we gather as the Church around the Lord’s table.

And whenever we come together around a table in fellowship, it can remind us that we are God’s people. We are Methodists- we eat- at family night suppers, at funerals and weddings, at church picnics. We will gather as we celebrate with Brian at a reception after services today. These simple acts bind us together.

There will be a storm. But we have prepared for what is to come- for this day, and the next and on into eternity. Faith, food and fellowship. We will stand the storm.