

WHEN THE STORMS COME

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Mark 4:35-41

As many of you know, I served as a Chaplain for the ATF, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in the US. As a Chaplain, I have attended numerous disaster scenes; from High School shootings to church burnings, airplane crashes, hostage situations and, well, you name it, I've probably been there.

In each of these situations my job is NOT to work with survivors or even the victims...I work with the first responders: law enforcement, medics, EMTs, Bomb techs, Medical Examiners, all those people who work inside the yellow tape, inside the crime scene. I do my best to keep these first responders, the people who see too much of this kind of thing, sane: Helping good people in bad situations, if you will.

Would you care to guess what is the most important, the most critical piece of preparation related to that kind of work? I'll tell you by example. Do you know what I mean when I talk about body armor? If you have served in the military or law enforcement, you do. It's the protective clothing you wear to help keep you safer in a dangerous situation. The most important thing is, you put on the body armor BEFORE you enter the dangerous situation.

In the same way, psychological and emotional training is some of the most important work done to help these responders prepare for the ugly things that will come in their lives. If you work in one of these fields, you WILL see ugly things. The best you can do is prepare for it in advance; mental and emotional preparation ...psychological body armor, if you will. The more you prepare, the safer you will be. And that's true in all our lives.

No matter who you are, or what your life is like, there will be storms. Some minor, some major. Often, others will not understand because the storms you face are YOUR storms and are as big as they are big to you. Other people's opinions really don't count. YOU are the one having to face YOUR storms. It's a simple fact...you WILL face storms.

You see, **Storms come**. Sometimes they come suddenly and violently.

Sometimes they tear your world apart. Jesus and his disciples were crossing

the Sea of Galilee. Suddenly a furious squall came up, and the waves broke over their boat, nearly swamping it. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.

The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. And he said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were now more terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Storms come. They may not come in the form of a sudden, furious squall, or a hurricane. Sometimes they come in the form of a phone call--from a doctor confirming a diagnosis, from a police officer telling you of an automobile accident. Storms come in many forms--a note from a spouse saying she's leaving, a pink slip from an employer. **Storms come.** Just as they came to those disciples on the Sea of Galilee.

Here's what's frustrating: Sometimes when storms come, it seems as if God is asleep. "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" asked His terrified disciples. And sometimes when we are going through a crisis, it does seem that either God doesn't hear or doesn't care.

You may remember Robert Browning's famous poem:
The lark's on the wing, The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his heaven, All's right with the world.

Browning wrote those words in the mid-nineteenth century, an era of boundless optimism. But after two world wars, the Holocaust, and numerous genocides, as well as the terrible specter of international terrorism, trade wars and refugee disasters, few people would now dare to say, "All's right with the world."

In our text for today, Christ does stir from his slumber. He rebukes the wind and says to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" When the wind dies down and is

completely calm, he turns to his disciples and asks, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

This is the crux of the lesson. We know that storms come. We believe that Christ has the power to calm the storms. **Why are we afraid to trust God’s promises?**

Christ knew that his disciples were human beings, given to fear. He knew that they were still growing in their faith. His retort to them sounds harsh, but it is the harshness of a coach who wants his players to get the routine down precisely so that when they are tested they will be able to respond as they were coached.

Jesus wants to help us with our fear--for a greater tragedy than the storms that come in our lives is the inadequacy of the response that we make to those storms. Are we prepared? How will we respond?

Let me make some brief suggestions about how we can cope with life in the midst of life’s storms.

First of all, prepare for them. That makes sense, doesn’t it? If we know storms are going to come, don’t you think we ought to prepare for them?

A TV news camera crew was on assignment in southern Florida filming the widespread destruction from a recent hurricane. In one scene, amid the devastation and debris, stood one house on its foundation. The owner was cleaning up the yard when a reporter approached him. “Sir, why is your house the only one in the entire neighborhood that is standing?” asked the reporter. “How did you manage to escape the severe damage of the hurricane?”

“I built this house myself,” the man replied. “I also built it according to the state building code. When the code called for two-by-six roof trusses, I used two-by-six roof trusses. I was told that a house built according to code could withstand a hurricane. I did and it did. I suppose no one else around here followed the code.”

That man was prepared. He had carefully prepared in advance and that preparation showed. But suppose that storm had been cancer or the loss of a child or some great tragedy, how could he have prepared? There are many ways.

HE COULD HAVE MADE SURE HIS RELATIONSHIPS WERE STRONG.

His family relationships, his relationships with his friends. It helps when you are going through a storm to have others there with you.

You may not be blessed with a family, but you can build your relationships here in the church so that you will have people who will be there as your support group. Ask someone who has gone through the storm of an illness or the loss of a loved one whether close relationships made a difference. I guarantee you, they do.

He could have also prepared himself for the storm physically, mentally, spiritually. For example, does your general health make a difference in a storm? How well you've taken care of yourself can make a significant difference when you are struck by a catastrophic illness. We don't talk about this much at church, but maybe we ought to. A person undergoing surgery or chemotherapy or radiation will generally do better if his or her overall health is good. Being in good physical condition is also a good way to deal with the depression that inevitably comes with a terrible loss. Prepare for life's storms by keeping yourself fit. Don't wait until the storm comes.

Mentally and spiritually we prepare ourselves by building our lives on the Rock. There comes a time in our lives when we must decide what we believe and how we will live. "I will live according to God's building code," we decide. "I will live a life of quality, trusting God's promises." Or not. That choice is ours.

There are other ways to live that might bring us more sensual gratification and less sacrifice, but we believe that our lives have purpose and meaning, that a loving Creator has intended our lives for something more than mere animal satisfactions.

So we choose to live our lives according to God's code so that, when the storms of life come, we respond reflexively with faith and not fear, just as a well-trained athlete responds in the contest as he or she has been coached.

This is not to say that we cease being human. We still may go through all the steps associated with grief and loss--denial, anger, rejection, guilt, bargaining, depression/confusion, and acceptance. But we go through the process without being overwhelmed. We go through that process with our coach at our side every step of the way.

Then, eventually, when the storm has run its course, as all storms do, we see how God has guided us through. We had despaired at times that we could not possibly make it, but we do make it and we give God the glory. And, if we are wise, we reflect on the lessons we have learned from this experience. For this is one good result from facing the storms—it can produce growth.

That's the way it works for people of faith. We don't escape the storms. Some of the storms will give us scars. My daughter who was so terribly hurt in a family auto crash has a number of scars...and a t-shirt to go with them: The shirt says, "Scars are like tattoos, but with better stories". We wear them proudly, for we could not be who we are today without the growth that those scars brought with them.

So, what is YOUR body armor to face the storms, the storms that ARE coming?

Prepare yourself by building strong relationships. Relationships with people of faith, people who you respect and trust. People who will stand by you even as you would stand by them.

Prepare yourself by keeping yourself fit physically, mentally and spiritually. Do what it takes to take care of your physical self, to develop your mental self and to constantly grow in your spiritual self.

Remember in this kind of preparation, It's not about muscles, it's about endurance.

Decide to build your life on the rock of faith. Building the strongest building on crumbling sand will do no good in the long run. It might feel good now, but life has a way of changing on us. There are few ancient buildings in Europe that were built on worthless foundations.

Choose your foundation carefully. With the bedrock of faith, you WILL be strong and ready for when the storms come.