



Food for Thought: Storms

“Do your best, prepare for the worst— then trust GOD to bring victory.”

~ Proverbs 21:31

There is an old saying in the Navy when you say good-bye to someone you wish them “Fair Winds and Following Seas. That phrase represents the ideal underway conditions for which Sailors yearn. Wind to fill your sail and a current pushing you along. In life’s journey, we always hope that it will be smooth sailing, but there are times when we will experience contrary winds and sudden storms, as my Navy friends say – everything going against us. There will be times, as Jesus himself promised when the rain will come down, the streams will rise, and the winds will blow and beat against us. Storms it seems, are inevitable.

When I was younger, we spent quite a few years in the South assigned to military bases. I was always afraid of storms, especially the thunderstorms and tornadoes. I think that was because I felt so small and helpless in the face of all that power and ferocity.

Now that I am all grown up, I admit that there are still times when I still get during storms. I worry that a tree will fall on the house or that the roof will spring a leak or that one of my loved ones will be in a car accident because of the slippery roads. I am certain that I am not alone. I have talked to others and they too imagine all sorts of dire happenings during storms especially with all the fear mongering done by the media. They always seem to broadcast the worst possible situations. I guess that is because of that adage that you “prepare for the worst and hope for the best” or maybe it is because they have stock in the toilet paper, milk and bread companies.

I looked up that phrase on the internet to see its origin, and what did I find? That saying is Biblical! It comes from Proverbs 21:31. It reads: *“Do your best, prepare for the worst— then trust GOD to bring victory.”* It is no surprise that the secular world is always leaving that God part out.

But My fears were kept to a minimum because I knew my parents would take care of me. So why then as an adult, am I afraid that my Heavenly Father won’t protect me the same way my earthly parents did? Maybe instead of putting on my raincoat, or going down in the basement as our parents taught us, maybe we should just climb under God’s umbrella first! But we don’t.

That might work for physical storms, but like the rest of us, I too, face those unexpected storms in life. After listening to prayer requests during our recent prayer and fasting period, it was clear that a lot of our congregation are experiencing storms now. I heard about illnesses, death of loved ones, financial issues, spiritual issues, loss of jobs and stress. It seemed that the dark clouds of doubt and despair were threatening to break open and dump on the people at any moment and all they had to protect themselves with were their thin raincoats of self-protection and self-preservation – they wanted and needed God's help.

The Scriptures tell us of the time when Jesus told his disciples to get in the boat; they were going to the other side of the Lake Tiberias – also known as the Sea of Galilee. While in that boat, a fierce storm blew up. I can picture the disciples, all of them seasoned sailors, bailing water out of the boat with all their might as the storm raged to keep it upright. As they frantically struggled against that torrential downpour and the crashing waves, I imagine that they began to get a little nervous and started thinking about drowning. Jesus who was sleeping in the boat, was awakened by one of His frightened disciples who accused him of not caring. They shouted, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" So, Jesus rebuked the wind and the raging waves and the storm stopped and the seas were calmed. Then he asked them, "Where is your faith?"

Where was their faith? When they left the docks that evening, everything was fine. But it only took a split second for things to go horribly wrong. The winds picked up and the waves crashed over the sides of the boat, and the disciples were afraid and filled with fear, anger, frustration, and uncertainty. I am sure that they probably wondered how long the storm would last and whether they would make it safely to shore. More than likely, they probably also wished they had never gotten in the boat in the first place.

But had they somehow avoided this storm, they would have missed the demonstration of Jesus' power over the sea and wind. When Jesus calmed the seas and the winds, their fear changed to relief and hope. Similarly, we may not sense God's presence during a crisis, but He has promised to always be with us. The assurance that the Lord had dominion over the tempest and that He was there with them gave them immediate comfort. I am sure that it also infused them with courage, and a sense of confidence that they would endure the storm and indeed, live.

No one enjoys suffering. But in the hands of God, our trials become tools that He uses to shape us into the people He intends us to be. That night, Jesus allowed the disciples to experience the fear and anxiety of being in a boat in a raging sea because He had something far more important to teach them. I think that He wanted them to recognize their own helplessness and to learn that their dependency on Him was all that they needed to get them through that storm or any other storm.

Every time one of life's storms blow into our lives it is like the Holy Spirit asking us that question again– "Where is your faith?" When trouble strikes, we seem to forget everything that we have learned about God. We forget the times that He answered our prayers, we forget the times that He provided us with guidance; and we forget all the times that He was there for us when we needed him.

I am sure that is because in a crisis, we only focus on the here and now. Our minds are spinning and consumed with thinking about what else could or might happen. So-much-so that our stressed-out and troubled emotions inhibit any clear thinking or remembering at all. Because of this, God points out that we lack sufficient resources and abilities to meet any of life's challenges on our own. We need Him to help us. Even though He knows everything we are going through, He is there orchestrating our circumstances for His glory *and* our benefit. But we forget that the outcomes will be shaped according to His will, not ours and are not always what we are wanting.

I am sure that the disciples experienced several "mountaintop moments" in their time with Jesus where they were overwhelmed by His presence and power. But when that storm arose that night while they were out on the Sea of Galilee, fear took over. Amidst the roaring waves and with the rocking boat, Jesus' chosen ones failed to recall any of the lessons they had learned about the power and purposes of their leader.

We need to remember that. That they too, were fallible and not as perfect we tend to think. We also need to remember that we need those storms because that struggle and difficulty in our walk adds authenticity to our testimony. Those we minister to will recognize that we know and understand their pain because we have been there, done that just like them. What credibility would we have if we never experienced any of life's pains?

I have never seen a storm that struck around forever. I know that when we have a lot of snow and it's cold and miserable outside, it seems like the storm will last forever, eventually the sun does come out, the temperature rises, the snow melts and before we know it, the storm is over. It doesn't matter if it is a tornado, flood, or snowstorm, we can always take hope in the fact, that no matter how bad things get, storms pass.

I for one will be the first to admit that when everything is going great, we think that we can do all things by ourselves. Early on my walk, I thought Jesus was only there to help us in times of trouble. However, when the storms began to hit my life and I began to draw closer to the Lord, I found out that He never leaves us - He was there in the good times as well as the bad. And just like the disciples, all I had to do is remember to put my faith in Him and trust.

Just when I think that I have it all under control, something happens. Even when I think I is the worst possible circumstances and that life couldn't get any worse, God points me back to that section in 2nd Corinthians where the apostle Paul tells of his sufferings just so I know what real suffering is about.

He said:

“I have worked harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep: I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food: I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?”

Paul went onto add that when we are buffeted by the storms of life, we must remember one thing: that God is with us in those storms. He never tells us to go out on our own; rather, he tells us to follow him who is always leading us. It is he who promised, “I will be with you always, even unto the end of the ages.”
If God is for us, who can destroy us?

Priscilla Owens, Christian author and hymn writer, captured that same sentiment in a poem that she wrote that later turned into one of the greatest Hymns of all time. Her Hymn, “Will Your Anchor Hold,” suggests that personal and emotional stability in a storm (faith) can only come from having the right foundation (God). She uses a seafaring analogy to make her point.

*“Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift or firm remain?”*

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul,
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Savior’s love.*

*It is safely moored, ’twill the storm withstand,
For ’tis well secured by the Savior’s hand;
And the cables passed from His heart to mine,
Can defy the blast, through strength divine....”*

And there it is. If a man can go through all that and still feel like God was there with him, why can't I? Paul is saying that ***Rather than focus on the problems, we should be focusing on the promises.*** We already have an anchor to hold us steadfast - Christ. So, if we focus too much on the problems, we lose sight of the promises and everything we have learned about Christ.

If you fix your eyes on Jesus and His Word, He will bring peace and calm to the struggles. I guarantee it. Because it is right there in black and white. He said so! We just needed some help remembering it.

God has a purpose for our pain. He doesn't always reveal it to us when we want Him to. And in some cases, we may not discover what it is until we get to Heaven. But He has promised us that if we love Him, He will use all the bad that has happened to us in those irritating storms in life for our good. It says so in Psalm 34 – "...The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all;..." Then they can be used for His glory and the advancement of His Kingdom.

So, when the Holy Spirit asks you that question in your next storm, you can say, "*Here, Lord. Here is my faith.*"

Just some Food for Thought