

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA**

The Very Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Dean

Scripture: Mark 6:47-52

*"Getting through the Storms of Life"*

**THE EXPERIENCE OF STORMS**

Nature has taught us that in this world there will be storms. The most common is the thunderstorm; that thunder can be intimidating, and the lightning outright deadly. For those in tornado alley, such storms can be even more devastating. Certainly, rainstorms without the thunder and lightning can bring flooding and destruction, too, as well as windstorms without the rain. Our home has been damaged twice because of windstorms. And here in WNY we are all too familiar with the snowstorm and in the worse case scenario – the blizzard. But add to this, such things as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, forest fires, and hurricanes; and it is a sobering reminder that life on earth will be interrupted from time to time with nature's wrath.

But such surprises are not limited to nature. In fact, I believe that nature itself is a metaphor for our own personal lives; that we will experience the same sort of disruptions personally in our everyday life. Things like illness, whether a temporary injury or sickness or in a worse case scenario – a chronic condition or even a terminal one; an interpersonal conflict where we have been hurt by another physically or more commonly emotionally. An addiction or dealing with an addicted loved one. The loss of a job, the break-up of a marriage, being victimized, a car accident, or a loss of a loved one. And then there is the prospect of falling into a depressed state. All of the above can be considered storms.

Now don't think I am original when it comes to saying that nature is a metaphor for real life. Jesus made this point at the end of His Sermon on the Mount when He said in **Mt. 7:24-27**: *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25" And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26" Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27" The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."*

Was Jesus speaking of real storms in nature? No. He was speaking of the storms that life will bring, the surprising and sometimes overwhelming challenges that we will face not only as believers, but in fact, that all people will face. And the point of His message is very simple – the only way we will get through the storms will be to build our house (our lives) on a firm foundation which is seeking and following the Lord. Recall Jesus said *everyone who hears these words of Mine and DOES them will not fall*. Those will be the folks whose lives will not only remain but will be strong even in the midst of the storms.

Now Jesus not only uses the storms of nature as a metaphor, but we find Him with the disciples on a number of occasions in the midst of an actual storm. And what happens in each case helps us understand how we can get through the storms of life. Note what happens in our Gospel lesson from **Mark 6:47-52**: *"When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. 48 Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. 49 But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; 50 for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them*

*and said to them, “Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid.” 51Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, 52for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.”*

Notice that the disciples were out in the middle of the sea. That is the absolute worse place to be if there is a storm. You have no protection, you have nowhere to go, and you are at the mercy of the waves. That is exactly the state one is in if they do not have the Lord in their life. They have no real protection, there is nowhere to go – it always leads to a dead end, and they are at the mercy of fate/chance.

And sometimes the storms that we experience in life are our own doing. We have decided to row out into the middle of the sea not paying attention to the warning signs, thinking this is just grand heading out on our own, not having to rely or listen to anyone else. That’s what two boys from Florida did a few years ago. They went out too far from shore in their boat and lost contact with the mainland. A storm came up and their boat sank, and both were lost at sea.

### **MERCY IN THE STORM**

Now we find in our Gospel lesson that the Lord immediately told his disciples to go to the other side. He did this because they were in Herod’s territory and following his miraculous feeding of the 5000, the people wanted to seize Jesus by force and make him king! (c.f. **Jn. 16:15**) So the storm they were in was allowed by the Lord. It was not their fault that they were out in the middle of the sea in the middle of the night. And as the storm came upon them, notice who went out to them! Jesus! Regardless of how we got into the storm, there is something Jesus always provides with His presence. Mercy! The mercy of God is always present in Christ. In another storm do you remember what Peter exclaimed to Jesus when he started to go under? Peter exclaimed, “Lord, save me!” Only Jesus can save us because He is the only One who can truly show us mercy. It is by His grace and mercy that we are saved. And he demonstrated this mercy time and time again when people got themselves into trouble – certainly the disciples – we just saw that with their being out in the middle of the sea and Peter crying out, - but also after they argued among themselves as to who was the greatest, and after they forsook Jesus and fled, and even denied knowing Him. But we see it with the woman caught in adultery, with Zacchaeus the tax collector, and even for those who were yelling crucify him, crucify him. Jesus said even from the cross, *“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”* Jesus’ mercy is always there especially when we are in the middle of the storm. There is always hope when we turn to Christ, no matter how much we have messed things up!

Yes, there is mercy in the storm when we turn and place our faith in Christ. There is something else that comes from Christ alone if we are in the storm, and that is direction.

### **DIRECTION IN THE STORM**

If you are in a storm and you don’t have shelter, what is the next best thing? Having direction to get to shelter. We need guidance to find our way out. If you are out to sea but near the shore, there is something called the lighthouse. Why are there lighthouses on the land? So the boat can find their way back to shore if it is dark or hard to see. Now if you are on land, you need to know where to go to take shelter. If you are in an unfamiliar area, it probably is a good idea to know your options if a storm arises. This is true in life. Jesus provides us direction and guidance. He does so by giving us His perspective, His Father’s perspective. And this perspective is conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit. But we have to ask for it. James writes in James 1:5-7,

*"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."* I find it interesting that James even uses the example of a wave to show the result of doubt. We must place our trust in the Lord for direction.

We see numerous examples of God giving His people direction in the midst of the storm. Think of Moses and the people of Israel as they were being chased by Pharaoh and his chariots. They were able to escape because the Lord led the way. Think of David and his fight with Goliath and later with King Saul, or Daniel in Babylon and later in the lions' den. Or any one of the other prophets? Of course, the same could be said for the Apostles Peter and Paul. God is there to give us direction – sometimes it is of a supernatural means – a vision, dream, angelic visitations and even miracles of deliverance. But we have two things that God's people did not have before Christ came – we have the complete Scriptural witness in the Bible – God's eternal wisdom and we have the Holy Spirit fully released. Jesus said in **Jn. 14:12**, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father."* How is this possible. Jesus tells us later in the same chapter – *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17that is the Spirit of truth... He will teach you all things....* and then in **Jn. 16:15** Jesus adds, *"He will take from me and disclose it to you."*

Not only does Jesus give us direction through His Word and Spirit, but He will give us peace.

### **PEACE IN THE STORM**

Jesus said in **Jn. 14:27**, *"Peace I give to you, My peace I leave with you, not as the world gives do I give it to you."* Jesus said in **Mt. 10:28-30**: *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30"For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

Jesus promises peace to those of us who follow Him. This does not always mean peace without – otherwise that would mean no storms! It means peace within despite the storms. But Jesus has the power to calm the storms! Recall what Jesus said in another account of the disciples being out on the boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus commanded the storm to be quiet, to stop! Jesus said, *"Peace, be still!"* The peace that comes is from abiding in Christ. The more we are grounded in Christ, the more we will experience His peace.

That peace will come only from placing our faith in Christ. For if you know the Lord is with you in the storm, whom or what do you have to fear?

### **POWER IN THE STORM**

And this leads us to the final blessing Jesus gives us when we are in the storms of life and that is His power! Jesus will not only give us power but will use this power to accomplish His will and will use it for His glory and ultimately our benefit and blessing! That power does come in the form of direction and peace but it also involves accomplishing His will for our lives. God's power does not always just mean miraculous deliverance but life transformation - bringing good out of the bad. How many people have come to Christ or

have had their faith deepened as a result of a storm they faced and went through? I can think of one such example in my own life.

When I was in my sophomore year of college at UB, I had appendicitis; and though the surgery went well, the incision got infected afterwards. As a result, I was laid up at my house for six weeks and had to soak in the tub each day to allow the infection to clear out and incision to heal. My world was turned upside down. I couldn't go to class, I had to pick up my homework, and I couldn't do much of anything. Though it was a difficult time, it allowed me to really seek the Lord as to what I was supposed to do for the rest of my life! I had just finished the summer in Yellowstone on a Summer Project sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ. During my time there I learned the importance and impact of sharing my faith and grew in my relationship with Christ. It was a mountain-top experience but now I was in the storm. And yet, it was the storm that allowed me time to sense the Lord's call on my life for full-time ministry, and by the end of the semester I moved out of my original major of Chemical Engineering and changed it to history where I could take some Biblical Study classes as electives. The discernment process was not easy as I now went from the certainty of Chemical Engineering to the uncertainty of working for the Kingdom of God. But that storm served as the starting point to something new and better.

How many of us here can think of the storms in our life and how God actually used them to bring us closer to Himself and to show that He truly is faithful? God's power is not just displayed in signs and wonders but in changed hearts. And it all begins when we put our faith in Christ no matter what the storm is! So do you want mercy in the storm? Do you want guidance, and peace, and God's power in the storm? Then build on the foundation that is Jesus Christ and follow Him! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!