

Wesley Celebration

Getting Through Life's Storms

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Years ago a farmer owned land along the Atlantic seacoast. He constantly advertised for hired hands. Most people were reluctant to work on farms along the Atlantic. They dreaded the awful storms that raged across the Atlantic, wreaking havoc on the buildings and crops. As the farmer interviewed applicants for the job, he received a steady stream of refusals. Finally, a short, thin man, well past middle age, approached the farmer. "Are you a good farmhand?" the farmer asked him. "Well, I can sleep when the wind blows," answered the little man. Although puzzled by this answer, the farmer, desperate for help, hired him. The little man worked well around the farm, busy from dawn to dusk, and the farmer felt satisfied with the man's work. Then one night the wind howled loudly in from offshore. Jumping out of bed, the farmer grabbed a lantern and rushed next door to the hired hand's sleeping quarters. He shook the little man and yelled, "Get up! A storm is coming! Tie things down before they blow away!" The little man rolled over in bed and said firmly, "No sir. I told you, I can sleep when the wind blows." Enraged by the old man's response, the farmer was tempted to fire him on the spot. Instead, he hurried outside to prepare for the storm. To his amazement, he discovered that all of the haystacks had been covered with tarpaulins. The cows were in the barn, the chickens were in the coops, and the doors were barred. The shutters were tightly secured. Everything was tied down. Nothing could blow away. The farmer then understood what his hired hand meant, and he returned to bed to also sleep while the wind blew.

SPIRITUAL TRUTH:

When you're prepared, you have nothing to fear. Can you sleep when the wind blows through your life? The hired hand in the story was able to sleep because he had secured the farm against the storm.

It's good and important to be prepared and to know what to do in the event of an emergency, and to know where to go and what to do when the storms seem to be coming, but sometimes in our lives, there are catastrophic events that occur without any warning. These are storms that come out of nowhere when our lives seem to be sailing along smoothly. There is no predicting these storms, and no way to prevent the damage and suffering that comes when we are caught in their path. There are many examples of these types of storms: losing your job, being diagnosed with a

chronic illness, the passing of a loved one, being financially destitute, getting that dreadful call in the middle of the night that a loved one has been in an accident, infertility, and the list could go on.

How do you prepare for something that comes out of the blue? Even the most experienced of people can get knocked over and overwhelmed; so, how do we, mere mortals, get through it? Well, if we take a look at Luke 8:22-25 we will see how some experienced men handle a storm that comes up unexpectedly. **“One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s cross to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and started out. As they sailed across, Jesus settled down for a nap. But soon a fierce storm came down on the lake. The boat was filling with water, and they were in real danger. The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves. Suddenly the storm stopped and all was calm.²⁵ Then he asked them, “Where is your faith?” The disciples were terrified and amazed. “Who is this man?” they asked each other. “When he gives a command, even the wind and waves obey him!”**

Now if you have ever panicked, freaked out, and all your preparedness went out the window. don’t feel bad because even the men who lived with Jesus lost it. The interesting part about this as well is that they were all experienced fishermen, they had gone through many storms on that sea before but this one seemed to take them by surprise and they panicked. But Jesus just slept peacefully after a long day of teaching and healing. How could he? Because he was prepared, he knew the maker of the storm, he knew that there wasn’t anything that his father didn’t give him authority over. And the disciples, they were terrified and amazed. Jesus chose in this case to calm the storm but sometimes God calms the child instead of the storm. He will not always make everything okay again but what he has promised is that you will never be alone. Jesus was there with his disciples in the boat, they weren’t left alone. They were left to see how they would handle it, and they weren’t prepared. They seemed to have lost their faith. How many times have you been in a bad situation and felt like losing your faith? You thought to yourself, “I thought God would be with me, I thought he would protect me?” I would also like to address a foolish notion that if you are a Christian and you follow Christ that nothing bad is going to happen to you. Some people believe that if they are really “good” and do everything that they are supposed to that they won’t suffer. They are wrong. I believe that God allows storms to come for many different reasons. One reason is to test us and our faith. How do you know if an airbag will save you until you are in an accident and it deploys? Or if a product works until you test it to see if it does what it says it will. We say that we are followers, we say that we love him, we know all the right words, do all the right things but what happens when the sky comes crashing down on you? Do you pray? Do you cry out to him? Do you blame him?

This is where spiritual preparedness comes in. Just like the fire and earthquake drills we used to do in school, oh and for you mid-westerners the tornados drills, we must practice what to do in case we are caught up in times of heartache, stress, grief, or loss. Spiritual preparedness consists of a few simple practices. First, we should be comfortable with prayer. If we have a practice of

praying every day – spending time in conversation with God, or in silence, listening for God’s voice in our lives - then we will naturally turn to prayer in the midst of an emergency. We will know that prayer can bring comfort and peace, and can sustain us when we need it the most. I think it is important to bring up that through this practice you are establishing a relationship; you are not calling on God when you need him, like a sugar daddy or genie, but are more calling upon the one you know to be the author and finisher of our faith. Just like the disciples in the boat they turned to Jesus and luckily for them he quieted the storm instantly. That will most likely not be the case for us but you can know that you are not in this storm alone.

Secondly, we would be wise to have some knowledge of scripture. Some knowledge of Biblical passages can bring solace in times of trouble and can be a very important tool when we are in the midst of dark times. The 23rd Psalm is a great place to start. There are many other Psalms and passages throughout the Bible that can also bring comfort. I can remember my first year in college, being away from home for the first time adjusting to the pressures of classes, friends, and freedom was hard. I went to a Christian college and we had to go to chapel every Wednesday as a part of our curriculum. Well, this particular Wednesday I was feeling very alone, isolated, and lost. We had a couple of professors who were talking about their mission trips to China and I wasn’t particularly interested but they gave the name of a verse from the bible but then never said anymore about it. It kept nagging at me that they didn’t talk about it. So, on my way back to the campus I stopped under this huge oak tree on the front lawn and looked up the verse, it was 1st Peter 4:12-16. I read it and began to weep because it was exactly what I needed to hear. This is what it says, **“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”** It was not okay that I was suffering but it made me look at it differently, that I should be honored that I may endure a fraction of the suffering Christ went through for me. It changed my whole perspective that day. Knowing scripture can be very empowering during a rough storm and being able to go right to that section of my bible still today is comforting. I think that’s why I haven’t ever gotten rid of this old ratty tore up bible because I have all my favorite verse marked, highlighted, and circled easy to find at any time.

Another way to be spiritually prepared is to actively participate in a community of faith. Coming to worship on a regular basis whether it is one of the a.m. services or Wesley Celebration, it is important to be connected. Becoming involved in the life of the congregation by participating in committees and small group activities will give you the support you need when the waves of life come crashing down on you. It’s good to invest our time and talents in order to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. Get to know each other by chatting before and after service, going out to lunch or dinner or coffee will help you to reach out to others and build that foundation of friendship. You will find that the more you give to the life of this group, the more you will receive on so many levels.

By doing these three practices I believe we all will be able to do something extraordinary when the storms of life come our way. Praise him. Casting Crowns a Christian rock group has a song called, "I will praise you in the storm" that has spoken to me and I would like to share it with you tonight. Really hear the words tonight.

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHdcyue0bSw>

"Every tear I've cried, you hold in your hands. You've never left my side, though my heart is torn. I will praise you in the storm." Powerful words of truth and being prepared can make all the difference in whether you can praise him in the storm or get lost in the waves.

One last way we can prepare ourselves is to partake in the Lord's Supper; by doing this you are celebrating and remembering the storm that he went through for you. By doing this we join our hearts and our minds and our souls and our worship and our prayers with each other who maybe experiencing a storm now of: sickness, job loss, poverty, fear, loneliness, addiction, the death of a loved one. These storms are huge, but our God is mightier than the most fearful storm. As you come to the Lord's Table tonight I want you to remember that it is his table not Wesley's table or the Methodist church's table but God's table and all are welcome. I also invite you to bring *your* storm and to share it with God before you take communion. I will be up here available to pray with you if you would like someone to pray with you.

Let us just take a moment and prepare our hearts before we partake of the elements. (pause) As we read from scripture, "**On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread²⁴ and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me." In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it."**" The table is ready for you, come and receive.