

God in the Storm – May 1, 2016

Job 28:20-27 and Luke 8:22-25

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I do a lot of driving. I love to drive. Given the choice of flying somewhere or driving, I would much rather drive, if at all possible. That being said, I have driven in quite a few storms over the years. In fact, coming back from Manitowoc a week ago Thursday, there was a rather nice downpour with a few flashes of lightning.

But several years ago, I was driving on I64 from Lexington to Louisville. The storm started like any other. Heavy, dark clouds looming larger as I approached. Then the rain came. Light as first, but quickly becoming heavy and fast. I checked my lights to make sure they were on so people could see me. That stretch of highway tends to be well-traveled. I kept a good distance between myself and the car ahead of me, keeping a close eye on it in case they slowed down or pulled off.

Then the storm intensified. I turned my windshield wipers to the high setting and slowed down. I considered pulling off the road, but the shoulders weren't very wide and I was afraid of getting hit from behind. I kept a slow, steady pace, thankful for the red taillights on the car ahead of me. I turned my hazard lights on.

Generally, I keep my radio or CD player on while I'm in the car. But I shut it off. I needed to concentrate and focus on the road. I could feel my heart rate increasing a bit. But I knew these intense storms didn't last long. I just needed to hang in there a few more minutes.

But surprisingly it got worse. The rain was so heavy I could see nothing but grey all around me. The taillights of the car ahead vanished from sight. As the adrenalin began coursing through my body, I felt myself on the verge of panic. I slowed down further, but still couldn't see to pull over. I drove not by sight, but by the feel of the road under me. Every sense in my body was heightened as I felt real fear start to build. And I began to pray. The gist of it was simply, "O Lord, get me through this storm!"

I'm not exactly sure how much longer the storm lasted. It certainly seemed eternal as I was in the midst of it. But eventually the rain backed off and the sky began to lighten and I could slowly release the death grip that I had on the steering wheel. It took a bit longer for my pulse to slow down.

The Ohio Valley is known for its storms. Lots of thunder and lightning. Brilliant cloud formations. Amazing rainbows. The occasion tornado. Since I've been here in Wisconsin, I've missed my storms. Especially this time of year. Spring storms in Indiana and Kentucky are wonderful. Pop-ups in the summertime – where the humidity is so bad, you feel you could almost swim through it, then a brief, intense shower passes through bringing cool relief.

I've never had to deal with hurricane season or, unlike my Oklahoma relatives, I've never dealt with tornados on a regular basis. And so far, I really haven't had to deal with bad winters, except the one we had a few years ago.

We know that storms are a natural part of the world in which we live. However, in ancient times, people believed that the weather was controlled by God or the gods. Bad weather or drought was seen as a sign of God's displeasure or a punishment for sin. Surprisingly there are those in modern times who still want to equate the devastation wrought by storms or other natural disasters as a punishment. I think it was Pat Robertson who tried to blame Hurricane Katrina on the sins of the people of New Orleans. We know that's a ridiculous statement. Hurricane Katrina happened because storms happen.

But for those who are the victims of natural disasters, often times the response that people have is why me? What have I done to deserve this? Or why did God let this happen to me? Or why did God allow so many people to suffer?

In the book of Job, that certainly is a valid question. Job suffered multiple tragedies, despite his righteousness. And the answer that he seems to receive when he questions God is, who are you to question the wisdom and goodness of God? The book of Job shows us that the natural world was created in such a way as to follow specific natural laws. In the end, storms happen because storms happen. But that doesn't mean we can't find God there.

Our story from Luke is one of my favorite stories about Jesus. He and the disciples are out on the lake fishing when a sudden storm pops up. The disciples get into a panic when they realize Jesus is sleeping soundly. They wake him up and ask him why doesn't he care that they are perishing? He chides them for their lack of faith and calms the storm.

What's interesting here is how the disciples reacted. These are seasoned fisherman. This isn't the first storm they've ever experienced. It may be the fiercest, but certainly not the first. Instead of going into storm readiness mode, they suddenly seem to have forgotten everything they know about what to do when the weather gets rough. They act like a bunch of amateurs, thinking that Jesus has to save them from something they should know how to handle. The disciples have the knowledge of what to do. They simply panic.

Now that's not to say that every storm we face in life is something that we should be able to handle. Some things can and will happen beyond our capacity to function. But that's the other part of this story that I like. While the storm rages around them, Jesus is still in the boat with them. If they had capsized, if they had drowned, Jesus was still with them. Jesus cannot calm every storm that happens, because, in this world that we live in, storms DO happen. Literal storms and figurative storms.

Not only is God with us in the midst of the storm, but God is with us after. When we think of how people come together to help each other; when volunteers come and provide immediate assistance and long term support and help; in those acts of compassion and kindness following the storm, God is there.

When we think of storms, we may not immediately think of God being in them. But when observing the raw power of nature, it's hard not to think of the immense power of the God who created the world. When being buffeted by the winds and the waves, it's hard not to call out to God for help in the midst of crisis. And when facing the aftermath of the storm, and assessing the damage done, it's hard not to think of God in those people who come in love to rescue and restore.