

**13 Pentecost
September 8, 2019**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

What a week! The anxious anticipation of Hurricane Dorian consuming just about every moment ... and it seemed to last forever. Do we evacuate? Or, do we shelter in place? Do we have the necessary hurricane supplies, or do we need more? Is our house safe from flooding ... or safe from falling tree limbs? When is this hurricane ever going to get here?

I was at Home Depot last Sunday evening ... a week ago ... and I overheard someone ask a sales person about generators. The sales person said they were sold out, but there was truckload expected in that night ... and the store would be opened at 6 o'clock on Monday morning. I was back at Home Depot the next morning ... not at 6am, but before 9 ... NO, I was not buying a generator ... but there was a whole row of empty pallets that had held new \$800 generators ... there were only three of them left. The same was true for the pallets that had held cases of water. And, the shelves were empty where the plastic sheeting and tape normally. Of course, that wasn't my last trip to Home Depot ... I am a regular customer after all ... and on Friday the man who had asked about the generators the previous Sunday evening was in line to return his brand new, in the box, generator.

I mention that story for a couple of reasons. Think of the anxiety of the man looking for the generator ... and the anxiety of the Home Depot staff person dealing with all these customers. Then think about this multiplied by all the stores selling water, or food, or other supplies ... and all the people trying to purchase this "stuff," and all the anxious sales staff at these stores. And, that doesn't include those businesses who are trying to decide if they should shut down or stay open. Or, all the employees who were looking at multiple days off work with no pay.

Yes. It was an anxious week. It was a stressful week for many.

And, I'm not immune to that anxiety or stress. Just look at my multiple trips to Home Depot ... and to Target ... and to Publix. Should we evacuate, or not? We made reservations at one hotel, then changed the dates when Dorian stalled over the Bahamas, then ended up staying at a different hotel with our two small dogs. All this while keeping an eye around-the-clock on the relentless reporting about Dorian on the TV.

Hurricane Dorian has passed us by. Most of us came through the storm with little or no damage. The sky is bright and sunny. So why talk about last week's anxiety ... this past week's stress?

Well ... we were fortunate. Most of the areas along the east coast of the United States were fortunate. This time. But, not so in the Bahamas. Dorian ... as a Category 5 hurricane ... stalled over the low-lying northern islands and obliterated almost everything ... houses, schools, stores, hospitals ... everything. Speak of anxiety ... no water ... no food ... no medicines ... no shelter from the blazing sun ... and no way out for all those people stranded on virtual sandbars in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

So, what do we do with all that anxiety? Not just the personal anxiety that each of may have felt, but the systemic anxiety ... the anxiety and stress that permeated our entire community and beyond. Sometimes that anxiety is taken out on each other ... angry outburst, or meltdowns in the checkout line, or the numbness that can be seen in glazed-over eyes. And, sometimes that anxiety is taken out on our loved ones and sometimes on complete strangers in the line at the supermarket. What do we do to alleviate that pressure?

Well ... one way to address that anxiety is to rely on our friends, family, and others in our community. We rely on them for help when we need it. But, almost as importantly, we rely on our family, friends, and even strangers to share with them our stories ... and listen to theirs. Coming to church on Sunday morning is one of those ways to deal with the anxiety we feel in our lives. This is our community of faith ... this is our beloved community. When we gather together it becomes a time to share our vulnerabilities with each other ... and to share our strengths.

Faith communities started as people told stories around a campfire. Back in a time before time, when our ancestors began what we now call societies, people share their experiences of joy and tragedies ... and a sense that there was some force greater than they were at play. I imagine those stories included ones of storms like Hurricane Dorian, and how people responded to its aftermath.

In a way, our time of coming together as a church community is a time to share our common plight, and to seek reassurance that something greater than us is still at play here ... that our faith in God is a common experience that give us individual strength ... and it gives strength to the community. By sharing our prayers ... spoken and unspoken ... we give voice to those hopes and visions that we have for ourselves and for others. It is a collective sigh of relief ... a communal expression of compassion ... a shared desire for wholeness of all affected. Being together means each prayer is amplified and affirmed ... that your faithful response in prayer is reinforced by the person sitting next to you in the pew. And, that sharing bread and wine at this altar is binding us all in one united sacred experience ... a holy meal.

So, we come to church this morning after Hurricane Dorian and hear the reading from Luke's gospel. These are not exactly comforting words. "None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all of your possessions," Jesus tells a large crowd in our reading. "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." If those two warnings aren't dire enough, Jesus issues a third ... a real zinger: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciple."

WHOA! WHOA! NO!!! Please, not more anxiety! Please don't challenge me anymore. So ... okay ... I'll preach about Jesus' exhortation some other time.

I'm going to make this short. However, I want to mention two things in closing. The first is that I received a phone call on Tuesday ... on my personal phone, not the church's phone ... from Bishop Howard. He was offering his support to the people of St. Cyprian's in any way that it might be needed. He told me that he was including us in his prayers, and he asked that I please share his love with all in the congregation. It was a phone call that I deeply appreciated ... it was an affirmation of the larger faith community responding in the same way that you and I respond to each other.

Secondly, you may have received an email from Bishop Howard about sending support to the Bahamas. The Diocese of Southeast Florida ... their Cathedral is in Miami ... has a special relationship with the Episcopal/Anglican Diocese in the Bahamas. Bishop Peter Eaton of Southeast Florida is sending relief supplies and volunteers to assist the recovery in the Bahamas, and Canon Allison deFoor of this Diocese is accompanying him in those efforts. If you would like to help in the support in this relief, I encourage you to pick up a copy of Bishop Howard's message on the table near the door. Another option is to make a donation to the Episcopal Relief and Development and earmark it for the Bahamas. There is also material about Episcopal Relief and Development near the door.

We are not the first people in the history of the world to go through these anxious times ... to live with this stress. Our Holy Scriptures tell us over and over again that others ... with God's help ... have survived a lot worse than our collective anxiety about a hurricane that only gave us a glancing blow. Those stories were written to comfort us when anxiety and stress occupy our lives ... and to strengthen us in our compassion for our neighbors who are victims of tragedies.

So, I will close with a psalm about those anxious times, and a prayer for us all.

Psalm 46:1-3, 5, 7

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,

though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

though its waters roar and foam,

though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;

God will help it when the morning dawns.

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Let us pray:

Almighty and ever living God, we bring our grateful hearts to you in thanksgiving and praise for bringing us through the peril of a threatening hurricane. Yet we are mindful of those who have

suffered injury, damage, or loss and ask that you would comfort them with your healing love. Strengthen those who are providing relief to the victims of this natural disaster, and open the hearts of those offering their financial support. As we continue through this turbulent season, help us always to place our hope, our fears, and our trust in you, for in you alone is life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Amen.