

“Faith in the Midst of Storms”
Luke 18:1-8

The great Protestant teacher Karl Barth acknowledged in his writings that our thoughts are often scattered. I imagine that for most of us, many of our thoughts remain scattered as we continue to check on family and friends, and make repairs to homes and property. The volunteers from Ohio, Connecticut and Rhode Island manning the Red Cross shelter at the other end of the building, I suspect their thoughts are scattered, too, helping others, waiting to go home.

Karl Barth suggests that when our thoughts are scattered it is important to give attention to the truth of the gospel that reminds us that we as Christians are a united community of sisters and brothers, that we carry one another’s burdens seeking God’s help and goodness when storms come, when trouble brings upheaval and displacement.

A terrible storm of wind and rain has left a path of destruction at a cost of over \$10 billion dollars. Some neighborhoods have been hit harder than others. Thousands of us are pulling out insurance policies, reading and trying to understand deductibles, trying to take the first steps on a road to recovery that we hope will not be too difficult as we drive by huge mounds of debris dotting our curbs and street corners.

Whatever our personal circumstances might be in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew, Jesus encourages us to pray and to not lose heart, to have faith even as what we call normal has been turned sideways. In a period of a personal storm and threatening circumstances, the Psalmist declared, “In God I trust. I will not be afraid.” (Psalm 56)

In the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew, it would not be surprising if we were to learn that more prayers have been offered by residents and property owners of Beaufort County in the last two weeks than the previous two months. When family and I evacuated the low country my prayer was very simple, “O Lord, watch over our homes and loved ones, and grant us the grace to work through what might be waiting on us when we return. Amen”

The last two weeks have left an impression on all of our children as well. As Kay escorted our two year old granddaughter to our home in Mossy Oaks Friday morning for the first time since the hurricane, Nita Grace posed the following question, “Moonie, is your house broken?” And Moonie said, “No, Sugar, my house isn’t broken. The house is okay.” And then Kay added, “But we pray for our neighbors whose homes are broken.”

One does not have to look very far to see homes and properties, some belonging to you, that are broken in some fashion due to water damage, compromised roof tops, and fallen trees. The new sound in our neighborhoods is the constant hum of chain saws, a hum that will last a little while longer as we clean our yards, get back to work, and seek the normal rhythm and pace of everyday life. But this process will not be conducted in some sort of vacuum. As we tackle the

beginning of each day with a long list of chores and things to do, it will be important to remember that we will accomplish this recovery one day at a time. Following the words and wisdom of Christ, may we pray for physical strength and a resilient spirit, and by the grace of God not lose heart.

As the Keeler Family prepared for the evacuation, we could not find available lodging in Walterboro, Orangeburg, Columbia or Montreat. However, Kay did find an available lake house in Haddock, GA; a small farm town some thirty miles outside of Macon, GA. The farmhouse was located on 50 acres of cleared land, with a fishing pond and 3 boats, large enough to accommodate our large family along with 2 dogs and 1 cat.

It was sometime Saturday night that we learned that the Sea Island campus and our homes had weathered the storm. Kay and I were especially thankful because we live in a low area of Mossy Oaks that frequently floods during heavy thunderstorms much less hurricanes. We knew what the order of the day would be for Sunday morning. We found a small Presbyterian congregation nearby. As our caravan made its way into the parking lot we quickly disembarked and entered the sanctuary where we were greeted by 1 preacher and 15 parishioners. We immediately doubled the size of the Sunday morning congregation and created such a stir that the service started some 20 minutes late.

What a worship service that was. 30 of us, half of us refugees from a hurricane, raised our voices in song, joined our hearts together in the morning prayers and listened carefully to a well-prepared sermon on the biblical theme of thanksgiving. I could not help but ponder afterwards all the inconveniences experienced and endured over the last few days, and yet there was so much to be thankful for. The overall well-being of the church, the congregation, and my family. "Lord," I prayed, "thank you for the many gifts of grace in my life. Amen."

Following the service, a photograph was made of the Wayside Presbyterian congregation and the Keeler Family on the front steps of the church. As we were saying our goodbyes, Beth Holloway, pastor of Wayside Presbyterian, placed 2 one hundred dollar bills into the palm of my hand and said, "This is for your lunch. May things be well when you return home." My first inclination was to return the money, but it occurred to that if I returned the gift it might offend the generosity of our new friends. And so I simply said, "Thank you" with the thought that I would share their act of care and kindness with someone else in the coming days.

A final thought. A lot of attention is given to the bad things that happen in the world, to the evil and shadows of darkness that exert influence over the human condition. Hurricane Matthew, however, brings to our attention the simple blessings that we often overlook and take for granted, the blessings of life, love, family and friends, grace and hope. The coming days are going to be different and they are going to be tougher for some as opposed to others. As Christians, let us remember our sense of community, our sense of responsibility for each other, and let us continue, in the words and wisdom of Jesus, to pray and not lose hope. In the words of Paul, we press on. Amen.