

Sermon Getting to Here

Ingathering

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Sermon: *Getting to Here*

It's quite a story, isn't it? You've heard it before, but I thought it was particularly apt this morning. There's a lot of wind and rain and flooding and misery happening, happening far from here.

I am glad to be here with you, glad the sun is shining, glad we're as safe as we can be right now. Some of us have family and friends and homes in the path of the hurricanes today. We pray as one for their safety and those with them.

We are sitting here surrounded by people and things familiar to us. We've filled our bowl with water from places that meant something to us; water that nourished us and sustained us. It's important, to remind ourselves how precious that is; to be together again, to see how good that is. But today we know that, for hundreds of thousands in the storms, little of what they know will ever be the same. The familiar will be gone. Some of us have endured and will endure the damage they face, and know how long it will take to recover and rebuild. And it's just as important for us to remind ourselves of that.

I told you that story, about the rain and the water suddenly becoming dangerous and how Rebecca Parker and her friend were ignoring the danger signs, because the storm in her story takes on a different meaning. By the end of the story, Parker isn't talking about the flood anymore, is she? How does she put it? "[T]he cold water of the storm poured down on us, baptizing us into the present – a present from which we had been insulated by both our car and our misjudgments about the country we were traveling through."

They were traveling along, assuming that everything outside was just as okay as it was inside their familiar little car. That everyone else has shelter and fuel. That everyone else can afford a car. That everyone else has the freedom to go where they want to; live their lives the way they want to. That everyone had already gotten out of the path of the storm.

Some of the destructive forces in life aren't as obvious as hurricanes and earthquakes. Forces of nature affect anyone or anything in their way. But there are huge forces in life that don't affect everyone equally. They affect just those without power, because they are minority or poor, because they are different. Some forces break humanity without having gale-force winds or being 8.2 on the Richter scale. Nonetheless, they create a rising tide of despair that lasts for lifetimes. There are forces in life that affect us right now, the way we see the world, the way we think of ourselves, that are so subtle and invisible we don't even realize they're there.

There's a part of me that can't help thinking that, like Rebecca Parker, we can be sitting in the path of danger and not see it. We can be sitting in the path of injustice and not see it. We don't recognize that we are right in the midst of suffering. Like Parker, we can be so ignorant of the country we live in. When we're out of the path of a particular storm, it is hard to see its effects on others and ourselves.

Even worse, we can be sitting in the path of suffering and not see a way out; not see others who can help. When we're in the path of a particular storm, it is hard to be in anything else, or believe we can do something – anything – to get out of its way.

There is a response to ignorance; it is knowing and caring and faith. Sometimes it takes a shock to the senses like being baptized by cold water into the present. Sometimes it takes hitting rock bottom. Sometimes it takes finding a community – a community with a mission to learn and grow and care and heal. Always it takes an act of faith.

Let us be a community that acts in faith. Let us be a community of people unafraid to stay in the heart of the storm – whether it be of our own creation or someone else's. Let us choose, this day, this week, this year, choose how we want to be so that we can learn and grow and care and heal. In the heart of the storm. In the heart.