

Sermon for St. Mark's October 14, 2018 Stephen R. Stanley 10:30 "Beyond the Storm"

Listen to the prayer of Job: *"Today also my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy despite my groaning...If only I could vanish in darkness, and thick darkness would cover my face!"*

Listen to the disciples *"They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."*

Listen to the CNN news, after the catastrophic hurricane Michael this week. One resident of Mobile, Aly Davis, had spent the day trying to get to her mother Madeline Fernandez, whose Panama City home of more than 15 years had been destroyed. "All we could do was salvage some valuables," said Aly, "She is devastated beyond words. This is the home she raised me in." "It's a very emotional day," she added. As CCN showed drone photos of this place of devastation and desolation, I prayed, with personal emotions, as the darkness covered my face, for a place I knew as a child, with my retired Panama City grandparents. In the 50's they always took me to Mexico Beach, to gather the best shells, by the beautiful and yet deadly waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Back then there was almost no development on Mexico Beach, just blissful solitude, and the surging waves, and quiet sands, where many natural and godly treasures waited to be found. In the 1960's I returned to attend a small community college, in Panama City, now Gulf Coast State College. Gulf Coast is closed, indefinitely, having been pummeled by 150 mph winds and record storm surge. In the 1970's I returned to PC again, to live in an Airstream travel trailer on PC Beach, working in the Medical Laboratory at nearby Bay Memorial Hospital, where we survived Hurricane Eloise in 1975. Bay Memorial, now lies now severely damaged, having evacuated to critically ill to other places of refuge. My last trips to Panama City were in 2004 and 2013, each trip to bury my parents in Forest Lawn Memorial Cemetery, a quiet memorial park, which now shares in what Aly Davis, calls "devastation beyond words." It may be that the last remains, of my parents, are now lost in the storm. That's very emotional for me, and yet, I know in Christ, my Mom and Pop can never be lost again. And neither can we.

We come to church today, with heavy hearts, searching, with our Brother Job," to seek God's presence in facing the present pain, loss and adversity. The great spiritual teacher, Henri Nouwen, once said: "I, more and more in my life, have discovered that the gifts of life are often hidden in the places that hurt the most. I am saying that

you can stand the pain. I think one of the great challenges of life is to dare to stand in your pain, and to trust that there is something beyond that which is safe. What begins to happen is something like the experience that there is safety beyond the pain, that if you enter into it, it's not so frightening as you thought it was, and that underneath your loneliness, there is an experience of being held safe..." Jason Christian and his family, and the Manleys, have taught us so much about seeking and finding that place of grace, in the past months of this year. For our Lord is leading them, as He would lead us, beyond the storm. For they say to us, as Psalm 27 says, "I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living."

In our Gospel, Jesus, on His way to the Cross, where He will not be held safe, encounters a rich young ruler, who just wants to save himself. *He asks, "Good Teacher Jesus, what must I do?" "What must I do to save myself?"* It is a trick question that begs the question, "What more must I do, (that I have not already done?)" The young man confuses his riches and his resume with his righteousness. He wants the Lord to see his goodness first, instead of seeing first, the goodness of the Lord." The young man has mistaken "being good," for "doing good." For what this highly religious man, kneeling before Jesus, really wants to hear from the Good Teacher, is, "*Young man, "You are blessed and good to go, by your own righteousness. That is blasphemy when only God can be that good."*As the old saying goes, "Some folk are so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good." Jesus says instead, God will first bless those who need Him the most, over those who run up to him to get what they want. The last blessed will be who are trying to be the first in line for eternal life. The rich young ruler sadly walked away from Jesus. when the Lord asked him to help those most in need. Jesus loved him and was sad for him, saying "How hard it is..." because what he possessed and the eternal life he sought, was for himself and for his glory alone. After that Jesus walked the way of the Cross for him and for us, and did not walk away from His sacrifice and our need. All of our self made security, all of our rest, can so easily be swept away, by events for which we are not, or cannot prepare or protect. All places of loss and devastation may not be ours, but they all are God's on the Cross. And so Jesus does not ask, "What more can you do for your own good, but what good you can do for those whose lives are devastated, for those who hurt the most, even as we speak?"My answer is ERD, the safest way to help. With our help, Puerto Rico, Wilmington and

Coastal Carolina and Panama City will rebuild new places, for tourists and residents by the waters, where the old stands no more. Maybe they will be better and stronger, and safer than they were before. But as good as they may be, they will still be built upon sand. Just as the young ruler's self righteousness, was built on shifting sand. Time and tide will still take its toll. Psalm 127 reminds us, "Unless God builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." For only when the power of Christ's resurrection, and in His unseen baptismal and Eucharistic presence, does not rest, but goes within and beyond the storm. Only in "our Helper He, amid the flood," can we dare to face the storms, and sing, as in this old hymn text:

*Beyond the storms I'm going,
 Beyond this vale of tears,
 Beyond the floods o'erflowing,
 Beyond the changing years.
 I'm going to the better land,
 By faith long since possessed,
 The glory shines before me,
 For this is not my rest.*

"For this is not my rest." The Book of Hebrews prays today, for that which truly is, our only home and our only rest, saying. "Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Eternal life is the place where God's Grace flows out of, not just into our lives. As the Lord goes on to Jerusalem and Mexico Beach, in their time of need, and our own, let us pray, on this very emotional day:

Lord, we are overwhelmed by our present times. We can hardly find words, but we know you understand what this world is going through. Oh Father – help us, not just to be good, but to do good, as we seek to help others find a refuge in these times! We know you promise to never leave us or forsake us. Be with us now- help us to know you are here. Lord, give us the strength we need today to help others make it through this trial. Give us and them, the hope of new life that can only come from you. In your saving name we pray, Amen.