

Series: A Place for You

September 10, 2017

Title: Shelter in the Storm

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Text: Isaiah 25:1-5

A Place for You!

What does it mean to be a church?

What's it mean to be a "church"? Why did God bring us together in this this place and at this time?

Part of the answer to that question is being played out right before our eyes in Florida. At this very moment literally millions of people are looking for a safe place in the storm that is Hurricane Irma. Just a few weeks ago we saw the same thing played out over a vast area in southern Texas. People were driven from their homes and apartments by rising water.

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Fellow Americans came to their aid with everything from National Guard trucks and Coast Guard helicopters to the volunteer Cajun Navy from Louisiana. In every case the goal was the same: rescue people from a life-threatening situation and bring them to a safe shelter.

A safe shelter means that there is a *place for you*. It doesn't matter why or how you got there. It doesn't matter who you were or what you had before the storm. The shelter is a *place for you*.

What does it mean to be a church? Well, for one thing, it means that we become that "place for you," no matter who you are. It means that we become a safe shelter for anyone in need.

A broken world:

The first part of the Book of Isaiah was written to a people who were experiencing the collapse of the only world they had ever known. They were a proud people with a long history of being a kingdom to be reckoned with in their part of the world. But now that entire world was unraveling right before

their eyes. The fierce winds and waves of foreign empires was undermining the very foundations of their entire existence.

Isaiah writes:

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Isaiah 24:4 NIV

The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish with the earth.

He goes on to describe what it's like when a political and military hurricane of this magnitude devastates a society:

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Isaiah 24:7-10,12 NIV

The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every house is barred.

The city is left in ruins, its gate is battered to pieces.

This is a broken world, one in which there is no safe place to be. It is a world in need of a shelter.

Under a curse:

And why such devastation? We can look at satellite imagery and see the source of the devastation in Texas or Florida, even as it unfolds. The hurricane is a force of nature, spawned far away in the eastern Atlantic Ocean, and fueled by warm ocean waters.

But the devastation that Isaiah describes is not the result of natural forces. It is the result of human beings making the wrong choices and breaking faith with the God who created them. Now the world is under a curse instead of a blessing. Isaiah writes:

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Isaiah 24:5-6 NIV

The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant.

*Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt.
Therefore the earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left.*

A curse that "consumes the earth": It touches everything and everyone. There is no escaping its consequences.

The world that Isaiah describes as consumed by a curse is the world we know as well. Drive the ship into an iceberg and the ocean becomes a curse instead of a blessing. Drive a culture into darkness and disorder and your world becomes a cursed place instead of a blessed one.

A world consumed by its errors and disorder is a world in need of rescue. It is a world that needs to rediscover what it means to be blessed. It is a world that needs someone to provide a place of shelter in the storm.

Stronger than the storm

Dome House, anyone?

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In 1989 Hurricane Hugo slammed full force into the South Carolina coast. It brought a storm surge of some 17', enough to destroy the Ben Sawyer Bridge that linked Sullivan's Island and the mainland. Almost every building on the island was swept away.

One of the many homes destroyed by the hurricane belonged to Huiet and Helen Paul. They determined to build a house that could withstand anything Mother Nature could deliver. Enter the Dome House.

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Take a walk down the beach on Sullivan's Island and you will certainly note the Dome House: it's unmistakable. And there's nothing else like it anywhere on the island. It allows storm surge to pass under the structure. It has special blinds that close to protect the windows. And it is designed to minimize wind damage. It may look like an alien space ship, but it's the place to be if you need to ride out the storm.

Stronger than the Storm:

So what kind of Dome House would we need to ride out a spiritual hurricane? Isaiah points the way for the confused and disoriented people of

his time by saying that the search begins with coming to the only One who can build something bigger than the storm:

Isaiah 25:1-3 NIV

LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago.

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You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigner's stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt.

Therefore strong peoples will honor you; cities of ruthless nations will revere you.

Israel had found itself at the mercy of nations vastly more powerful than she could have ever imagined. Mighty empires sent their armies like Category 5 hurricanes against their little land. They didn't stand a chance.

But Isaiah reminds them that their God is bigger than their enemies. He alone can neutralize their power. He is the God who does *wonderful things, things planned long ago*.

When the big hurricane hits Sullivan's Island someday, as it surely will, the architect who designed that funny looking spaceship of a house on the beach will be hailed as the one who did a "wonderful thing, a thing planned long ago." Isaiah says the same is true of our God. He is bigger than the storm.

Shelter in the Storm

A refuge for the needy:

Of course, the real test of a shelter is whether or not it works when the storm comes. Isaiah reminds us that God is not only strong enough to neutralize the spiritual storms that come our way, but He has a proven track record of providing shelter in the storm:

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Isaiah 25:4-5 NIV

You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat.

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For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall and like the heat of the desert.

You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled.

God Himself is the Shelter when we are attacked by the storms of this world. As the Psalm 46 reminds us:

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Psalm 46 1-3 NIV

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

“Who is this?”

One evening, after a busy day of teaching and ministering to people’s needs, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s go over to the other side of the lake.”

The eight mile voyage began peacefully enough, but when they were out in the middle of the lake a violent squall came up and threatened to sink the boat. Waves broke over the boat. Some of the disciples pulled hard on their oars to keep the boat headed into the waves, while the others bailed for dear life.

And what about Jesus? He was sound asleep in the stern! The panicked disciples woke him up and said: “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” (Mark 4:38 NIV)

Mark tells us that the God who does wonderful things took charge of the storm right then and there:

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Mark 4:39 NIV

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

That night the disciples made an astounding discovery. Here was Someone bigger than the storm that had threatened to drown them all. They asked each other: "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:41 NIV).

A Shelter in the Storm:

What does it mean to be a church? It means to be a place designed by the God who is bigger than the storms. And more importantly, it means to be a place where God Himself is present – like Jesus in the boat.

That's a very important part of what it means for us to become "A Place for You." We are part of God's network of spiritual shelters in the storms facing individuals, families and our community at large.

There was probably a time in your own spiritual journey when you needed to discover that God could be your refuge and strength, your shelter in the storm. Remember how it felt to come to Jesus and realize that He is greater than the storms?

Now it's our turn to make a place for others to discover the same thing: A shelter in the storm.