

I use the video not to impress you with our whitewater skills or as an example of providence. While my brother was certainly fortunate not to be bounced from the float altogether, what intrigued me was his response to the whole situation. As I recall the event, it flashes in my mind's eye almost like the slow motion video that you see. We hit a pocket in the rapids, Ross bounces in an instant, and I am looking down on my brother spread eagle on the gunnel of the boat grasping for a hand hold to pull him up.

Whereas, I would have been flailing and spazzing because of such an experience--probably floundering into the river as much by the force of the bounce as my own anxiety--he seemed almost calm. Time seems strange in those situations. I looked down and saw him on the gunnel. In shock at this sight, it took a split second to reach out and help him up. Again, what I found interesting was his response to the whole thing.

I remember that through the whole situation he kept talking in a very even keel manner. Initially, he responded to what had happened. "Whoa." But then he shifted to verbalizing what he needed to do. "Okay, get a hand hold." And then he moved to what we needed to do, "Keep the nose pointing down stream." and, "Grab the oars," and, "Work away from the rock." As I noted, my response would have been, "AAAAAYYYYYEEE!" prior to being dumped over the side of the boat.

All of this is a rather lengthy way into a reflection on how we respond to stress and crisis. For one thing, we all do it differently. However, there certainly are better ways than others to respond. The image that I have of my brother in those rapids in Montana is how I would like to think that I could handle stress and crisis going forward. I am cognizant that is wishful thinking.

Yet, practice certainly can help prepare us for those moments when our amygdala hijacks our prefrontal cortex, and we respond to events with our basest instincts. Precisely because our current political and social environment seems so chaotic and uncertain, it seems as if we are bombarded with stress and crisis at a much higher rate than even a few years ago. Thus, it is important for us to work on our responses or to work to develop responses that are ultimately helpful and constructive rather than fearful and panic-stricken. To use the rafting image, before we get thrown out of the boat, are there ways that we can help ourselves back into the boat and a sense of equilibrium?

I think that spiritual traditions have a great deal to offer in this arena. While they do not have all the answers and the difficulties of life will certainly persist, they do offer wise counsel for navigating the rapids that create anxiety and angst. Prayer is a wonderful place to begin. If you like, it can be the very analog to what my brother was doing. Not so much crying out for help. Rather, prayer, in this instance, is a verbalizing of the steps that we take to find our way back.

It's almost a narration of life that allows us a perspective on life and a way to honor that life. Prayer in this context does not hinge all its hopes on a cosmic knight in shining armor who can save the day. Prayer in this situation calmly articulates what is happening and moves through the experience toward a desired point of understanding. As always, a perspective that understands rather than one that conjectures is often more helpful.

Finally, the gathering of the community in worship is another helpful practice that can support and sustain. It is no coincidence that the main area of the sanctuary is called a nave. It derives from the Latin *navus* which is the root of our *navy* and it implies a boat. Literally, the early church conjured the image of the faithful in worship floating together in the boat of God through rapids of time and space. We are in this together, and we can manage the situations of stress and anxiety so much better together than alone. At times, one or another will take the lead. At others, there are those whose voices will speak the truth. At still others, there are the various hands that help keep us in and afloat.

While I don't have any burning desire to run the rapids on the Madison anytime soon. The image of that experience--and particularly my brother's crisis moment--remains in my thoughts and reflections. As it pertains to dealing with crisis, I find it a helpful metaphor. I hope that you do to.