

The Road Less Traveled – September 1, 2017

For the past week, as Melissa and I followed the news of the ravages of Hurricane Harvey, the whole thing took on a very personal note. Fourteen of our family members live in the Greater Houston area, and we felt helpless as we simply waited for updates from each of them as to their well-being. On Sunday night, my Dad told me that the water level around their house was within a half-inch of topping the foundation. They moved all of their downstairs furniture upstairs and had sandbags around all of their exterior doors. A flooded house seemed inevitable. At one point we lost touch with our niece and her family, and for several hours we weren't sure where or how they were.

I considered driving down there to offer whatever help I could, but there was no way to get into any of their neighborhoods. And so we prayed. It's what we do as followers of Jesus. Melissa and I prayed for the well-being of our family members, prayed that the water would be held at bay, and that their lives would not be upended the same way that so many lives already had. We prayed for them by name, lifting each person and their well-being as a desperate plea to God.

By Wednesday, it appeared our prayers had been answered. Though the water lapped the sandbags around my Dad's house, the water did not get in the house. Our niece finally made contact, and she and her family were fine. The water began to recede, and some of them were actually able to get out of their neighborhoods late Wednesday evening. When I talked to him that night, my Dad proclaimed, "Prayer definitely works."

He meant it as a praise to God, of course, but his comment left me unsettled. Because I couldn't help but think of all of the others who lost everything. The neighbors' two doors down from my Dad who had 14 inches of water in their home. The people who evacuated Rockport who still have no idea whether they even have a home to which to return. Did my prayers being answered somehow condemn those people to disaster? Did God not hear the prayers of those people and their families, who I imagine prayed just as hard as I did?

That's the difficulty with prayer. The truth is we really don't understand it. We are called to be a people of prayer, but we struggle with what it really means to have prayer answered or even for God to hear our prayers. Prayer is holy work of the greatest magnitude, but we approach it with an altogether human understanding. Our grasp of prayer is hugely affected by our understanding of God and how God interacts with Creation. And even that understanding can change based on the circumstance in which we find ourselves.

A few weeks back, I preached about prayer, specifically the difference between praying for God to intervene and praying as an intercessor. Most of the time we practice intervention prayer. We ask God to act upon our situation and make it better. To be with and comfort

those who are suffering. To heal those who are sick, and so on. But intercessory prayer is different. To pray as an intercessor is to seek to partner with God to bring about the healing and the comfort and the peace for which we pray. It is not to seek favors from God, but rather to seek to become an instrument of the hope that we desire.

Is my family safe because of my prayers? I honestly don't know and likely never will. But I know simply that I felt called to pray for them. In that moment, there was little else I could do for them. But far from a last resort, praying for them was the first and best thing I could do. But honest prayer also leads me to seek more. Not to simply give thanks to God for my family's safety, but to be a part of the peace and comfort that I sought for them.

We are the hands and feet of Christ, and that means that we must constantly pray for God to use us as such. To be that instrument of hope. So I encourage you to make that your prayer as the flood waters begin to recede, and thousands begin picking up the pieces of their lives. Take a moment to look over the item in this e-news outlining how we as followers of Jesus can help. And become an instrument of hope for all of those for whom we have been praying.

See you Sunday.