



Round Hill Community Church

Sermon: March 14, 2010

God's Comfort in Stormy Times, Robert B. Culp

Psalm 46; Matthew 6:25ff

We have a small Cairn Terrier, about the size of a puppy, whose name is Maverick. We call him "Mavvy." While he is small, he thinks of himself as the family's protector – leaping out the back door to chase away menacing squirrels or chirping birds; barking at the threatening drainage grates on the campus grounds; and every Monday and Wednesday night growling ferociously to protect us from all the dogs at Ken Berenson's Dog Obedience/Training Classes at the Community House. And when the doorbell rings, he races to the door barking loudly, but all the while wagging his tail!

He's a ferocious little beast ... and a brave little dog. Except when we have a storm, with lots of wind and rain and thunder. Then he shivers, whines, and cries ... and usually hides under the bed. So ... you can imagine his state yesterday, and especially last night when we were plunged into darkness just before 5:00, with the wind blowing and howling, and tree branches coming down all over the place. He was a royal mess!

As were more than a few of us!

In addition to Mavvy, Kathy and I spent some harrowing moments on the phone just at that time with Rebekah, who was on her way home from work in downtown Greenwich. With every road she tried, she found her way blocked by downed trees and fallen wires. At one point she turned around on Round Hill Road to head back to Lake Avenue, and a tree fell down very close to her, wires whipped the top and side of her car, and she let out a horrifying scream. She was terrified, and her mom and dad were not doing any better!

Finally, she was able to make her way back to the Post Road, after winding her way along some side roads following some guys in pick-up trucks (usually a safe sign!), and she made it to a friend's house where she spent the night.

So ... around 7:00 or so, Kathy and I surveyed the scene: no electricity, no heat, no water, a couple of candles flickering, one emergency lantern aglow whose battery was suspect ... and a shivering little dog who was beginning to pant!

It was quite a storm wasn't it?

We've had some damage around here – window screens down and broken; a glass-top patio at the parsonage smashed to smithereens; lots of tree limbs down ... but the basements are dry!

Just a few reflections to share with you this morning:

First of all, how awesome nature's forces are! To uproot huge trees, turn heavy patio tables upside-down, disrupt the normal routines of life in a matter of just a few moments in time ... and it reminds us of how little we are in the grand scheme of things. At moments like this, we think of Hurricane Katrina, the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile ... and how life changes so quickly. We discover how much we take for granted every single day, and how dependent we are upon electricity and the availability of water. It is all so humbling ... especially to us who are used to being in control and in charge.

Secondly, how grateful we are ... and beholden ... to those who seek to put things in order once again – the police and fire personnel, the emergency workers for Connecticut Light and Power, the American Red Cross, folk like Dan Natalie who has kept the emergency generators going through the night at the church and Community House, and many others. It is at times like these that groups become communities, and neighbors become true neighbors.

Also, it is interesting, in the midst of a natural disaster, how our world shrinks, at least initially, as we hunker down and seek to take care of our own needs, trying simply to survive ourselves, and striving just to get through tough and difficult moments. We come to realize that our present inconvenience will pass, that power will be restored and water will once again flow from our taps.

But after shrinking a bit, our world then expands, as we come to consider what it is like for all those others in the world for whom such storms and outages are not just an inconvenience ... but constitute indeed their “new normal” which may be theirs for many weeks and months, and perhaps years. As our world thus grows larger, we begin to think of others – to be responsive to them over the long haul; to be aware, to empathize, truly to see and hear them in their needs.

In this regard, I think of how our mission trips to Nicaragua and New York City (led by Shannon) have served to remind participants of this constant, insistent human need. Who is our neighbor? And then Jesus turns that question around in his parable of the Good Samaritan, by asking, “Who proves to be the neighbor?” It's a question that invites us out of ourselves and into the lives and needs of others.

I would like you now to share some of your own thoughts and reflections concerning the impact of the recent storm and its aftermath (time of sharing).

Let me conclude by returning to Mavvy.

Last night, he wanted only to be near us. Whenever we went upstairs, he followed and went upstairs. When we descended downstairs, he followed. Whatever room we were in, there he was at our feet ... panting. Once we got into bed beneath the covers, he begged to get up ... and I bent down and scooped him up to be with us (on top of the covers ... that's a line I would not cross!).

And so once on the bed, Mavvy curled up right beside me, burying his head under my arm and nudging to get closer and closer.

Comfort comes, reassurance comes, in the arms of those who love us.

Surely, God's arms are wrapped around us tightly and tenderly in these days of disruption and destruction, and this comforting embrace frees us to do the same in his name.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.