

HURRICANES FROM A PASTORAL VIEW

“We’re lucky in the northwest because we don’t have hurricanes.” So it may seem.

We only have major forest fires in Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon and California. Oh, and earthquakes on recent days in Yellowstone Park, and Los Angeles. If there isn’t something now, there will be.

“Hurricane” is a perfect metaphor for any catastrophic life experience.

My pastoral experience taught me that there are always unseen “hurricanes” bringing fear and trembling, worry and sadness to people among us. Most of life’s “hurricanes” pass to become a tropical storm, a vivid but fading memory. Some storms do not pass. If you have been, or are in the midst of an out-of-control life experience you know what I’m talking about.

In my church ministry our staff would have a “top 10” list of members in some kind of crisis needing special attention. Serious illness, accident, marital problem, grief or other life-engulfing situation. We didn’t call them “hurricanes” but to those involved it was not much different.

Hurricanes bring an outpouring of compassion from strangers and neighbors alike. There is comfort in knowledge of care and presence. But we can’t allow ourselves to trivialize suffering or brush it aside because it “missed us.”

Natural hurricanes are only one variety. Most people are probably unaware of mass forced migrations and city-sized refugee camps. The number starvations in the world is staggering. Threat of warfare hangs heavy over many. Young people who live and go to school in our cities and towns hope that the frightening threat of deportation will somehow turn another direction. You can think of other things bringing terror to some people. A natural hurricane might seem more survivable.

I try to remember that virtually every adult carries an embedded “hurricane memory” or memories. The long-past memories and feelings, good and bad, can flash back at any time. Post-Traumatic-Stress-Syndrome is a more recent name for what is really “hurricane memory.”

People ask, *“When will I get over it?”* Grief counselors used to say that it usually fades in six months. We said that if it still hangs heavy after a year you probably should talk to a counselor. Well, now I am more likely to say, *“It’s a part of your life history and story. It will gradually take its place in the past as you create more new history. But it will never completely forget itself away.”*

So, after the hurricane comes the time to sift through devastation to see what’s left and start rebuilding. Hurricanes are not what we bargained for in life, but from the Big Bang on, being part of life in the Cosmos means living with hurricanes.

A long-ago poet wrote in one of his psalms,

***“The Lord is my shepherd...He makes me lie down in green pastures...
He leads me beside still waters.”***

And when the still waters turn to storm his faith is that

***“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
I will fear no evil;
For thou art with me...”***

We pray for faith and strength to walk through the storm without fear, but it’s not easy.

Who do you know at this moment that is in the path of a “hurricane?”