

Harvey. Irma. Sandy. Katrina. Andrew. Agnes. They sound like names you would hear at a cocktail party in the 1950s, but we know them in a very different context. These are the names of some of the most devastating hurricanes in history -- storms whose impact on the lives of people in this world continue long after the clouds have parted, the floods have receded, and the winds have died down.

Naming storms is something that we humans have been doing for a long time. In a practical sense, storms are given these short and distinctive names as a way of reducing confusion when two or more of them occur at the same time. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) began the process of officially naming Atlantic storms in 1953, at first using female names and naming them in alphabetical order. Male names were added in 1979. But people were naming storms long before the WMO. In the 19th century, for example, hurricanes were often named after saints of the Roman Catholic Church, like Hurricane Santa Ana that struck Puerto Rico in 1825.

While reducing confusion may be the official reason these terrible storms get names, something psychological is in play when a name is assigned to a force that threatens us. In fact, the word "hurricane" is itself derived from the Spanish word *huracan*, which was likely inspired by the Mayan storm god Hurakan. Ancient peoples often put names to forces of nature that were mysterious and destructive as a way of attempting to control or manipulate them. Of course, you can't control a hurricane, but naming it at least gives us a way of identifying a common natural enemy.

According to biblical scholars, the fishermen of Galilee didn't give names to the many storms that came screaming out of the Valley of the Doves on the western shore. They weren't pagans, or Gentiles, so they didn't believe that the forces of nature were controlled by some pagan god throwing a tantrum. As Jews, they believed in the one Creator God, but they also knew that these storms were a

real threat to their lives and livelihoods. While they didn't give names to tempestuous weather, they knew that whenever a squall blew up on the lake, it was a reminder that they were still vulnerable to forces of chaos, evil, and death.

In fact, in much of Scripture, the sea represents calamity. The Israelites weren't really a seafaring people, so the vast Mediterranean Sea to the west, and even the smaller seas like Galilee (where the fishermen usually kept their boats close to the shore) represented the unknown -- the dark deep, the place where terrible sea monsters waited to devour you. The sea was the place from which some people never returned.

All we have to do is open our Bibles to the first verses of Genesis to see that the sea represents chaos. When God created the heavens and the earth, "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." Darkness, wind, deep: the image of a churning storm. And yet, in the midst of the stormy chaos, God separates things out, bringing light to pierce the darkness, separating the waters from the land. The creation story is how God begins to bring order out of chaos, which becomes a metaphor for the whole biblical story: the story of how God deals with evil.

It's no coincidence then, that the first major story after creation is another boat story. Noah is a righteous man who obeys God, builds a huge ship, and prepares for God's judgment on a world where the wickedness of humanity was its own storm. God allows the chaos of the waters to break loose in a horrific flood, reverting back to the watery void found in the first chapter of Genesis. And yet, while the waters rage, God saves Noah, his family, and the creatures of the earth on an ark tossed about by stormy seas. God's judgment, God's grace, and God's rescue come together on a boat.

Noah steps out of the ark and into a new creation washed clean by the flood. Chaos is pushed back again. Indeed, this is how God is going to deal with evil

going forward: not by unleashing chaos, but by working toward a new creation. The story of the Bible is the story of how God does that through the story of Israel -- a story that reaches its climax in Jesus.

+ It's the Exodus story of God parting the waters of the Red Sea to save Israel from the evil of slavery in Egypt. + It's the story of Isaiah looking forward to a day when all can come to the waters and drink without fear + It's the story of Jonah tossed into the raging sea, but saved by the belly of a whale.+ It's the story of Jesus, going through the waters of baptism and into the desert to do battle with the forces of evil. The story of Scripture is the story of how God brings His chosen people through the waters of evil and into a new creation.

It's no accident, then, that St. Mark preserves this story of Jesus and his disciples on a boat being tossed by an unexpected and violent storm. The chaos rages once again; rickety boats are swamped by 10-foot waves and they start to sink. Fear, horror, and eventually desperation washes over the fishermen, who have clearly never experienced this type of storm. Mark tells us that in the midst of all the chaos, Jesus is in the stern of the boat napping quietly on a cushion. The disciples, meanwhile, are in a panic.

Jesus apparently doesn't sense the chaos, the evil that surrounds them, and so they are concerned. "Wake up!" they yell over the howling wind. "Don't you see that we're dying here? Don't you care?" Jesus wakes up, and maybe looks at them for a long moment with one eye open. He doesn't answer their question. Instead he stands and addresses the wind and the waves. Mark says that he "rebuked" the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" (Isn't it interesting that these are roughly the same words that Jesus uses to cast out demons? He rebukes them and tells them to be quiet. It's no coincidence that the next scene in Mark is Jesus casting out a demon on the other side of the lake. Mark, as well as the other

gospels, makes it clear: Jesus has command over the wind and waves, over chaos and calamity, and over evil and despair.

Now we, along with Mark's readers, might expect Jesus to give his disciples an explanation of how he did that! How did he calm the storm? How did he turn a violent, raging sea into a placid pond of tranquility? We might expect a presentation outlining Jesus' humanity and divinity. We might even expect Jesus to smile and go back to sleep, leaving the disciples to wonder about what they had just seen. But rather than riff on this display of power, Jesus instead turns and asks them a question: "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Our Lord's question may cause us to wonder if the disciples were debating on responding with something like, "Well, duh, of course we were afraid! We were in a Category 5 storm, we almost died, and then you stand up in the boat, raise your hands like Moses over the Red Sea, and the forces of nature obeyed you. So yes. We were afraid!" In their fear, however, the disciples had forgotten an important truth: they had forgotten who was in the boat with them. In fact, in the midst of their fear and uncertainty they woke their teacher up so that he could share in their panic.

Jesus, on the other hand, wants them to have faith -- not fear. "Always remember, I'm in the boat with you," Jesus says in effect, "and I've got this." Which is an excellent thing for us to remember when certain storms in this life hit us with great fury. Many devastating hurricanes can hit our lives no matter where we live: + Hurricane Cancer + Hurricane Divorce+ Hurricane Unemployment + Hurricane Financial Crisis + Hurricane Grade Point Average, +Hurricane Covid.

Take just a moment to think about your own hurricane or hurricanes? Where is Jesus in the midst of these storms? Where is Jesus when the typhoon of a devastating illness hits? Where is Jesus when the lightning strike of a loved one's death leaves us in shock? Where is God when the waves of death, destruction, and

doubt threaten to sink us? Where is Jesus??? He's in the boat, with us, that's where he is, and there he invites us to turn from fear to faith -- the kind of faith that Jesus himself had in God, the diviner creator who brings order out of chaos and who will one day still all storms forever.

At the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation, we see a vision of the new creation made possible by Jesus' faithfulness on the cross, and the triumph of his resurrection as the completion of God's plan. In chapter 21 we read about the new heavens and the new earth "coming down" and casting aside all the storms of evil from the old creation, making all things new. As John sees this vision, he notices that in this new creation "the sea was no more." There's no place for evil in God's new creation. No place for tears. No place for mourning or crying or pain. No more storms!

Ok...so what will be there you might be wondering? Hear the good news: "See, the home of God is among mortals," says a loud voice. "He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will dwell with them." In the new creation, the sea and all the tempestuous evil will be gone, but our God, revealed in Jesus, will be with us. In other words, the Lord will always be in the boat with us!

Many people these days are facing serious storms with memorable names. They're afraid, and rightly so. But can we put our faith in the One who lived and died by faith? Can we focus our eyes on Jesus, the One whom the wind and the waves ultimately obey, when we see the wind and the waves coming our way? When the ship is tossed to and fro, instead of only thinking about our doom, can we instead imagine the calm and hope of a new creation?

Faith doesn't mean that we won't suffer. Jesus himself suffered and died while holding on to faith. Faith does mean, however, that we can trust the Lord with our future -- a future made possible by Christ's faith in God's new creation, by an empty tomb, and the defeat of death. Our baptism in water reminds us of this --

water which was once a sign of chaos and death, is now viewed as a sign of new life, love, joy, forgiveness, and so much more!

The World Meteorological Organization uses a rotating list of names to identify hurricanes, but some storms are so devastating that their names are retired to a sort of hurricane hall of fame. Harvey and Irma are likely to make the list for that dubious honor. Whatever storm we are facing, may we do so knowing that the One who is in the boat with us will one day retire all of our named and unnamed maelstroms and memories forever. And Thanks be to God. for that. Amen.