



THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF HOPE AND HELP

So, how are you doing? As I write this, with my area reeling from Hurricane Helene, that is the key question we need to be asking one another. The storm has affected every aspect of creation: human life and livelihood, animals and their habitats, the beautiful landscape and vegetation. Daily life has been turned upside down, plans are derailed, hearts are broken, dreams are dashed. Death has raised its ugly head. But for people of faith, none of this has the last word. And this is true not just for Helene or Milton, but in all of the “storms” of life that we face, time and again. How do we cope?

First, we look up from the traumatic circumstances to get our bearings: “I lift my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:1). Sear this truth into your mind afresh each day, to remember that Almighty God is present, that He will supply help, and that no problem is too big for Him.

This looking upward is the beginning of prayer – honest prayer – about the many storm-related problems, and about our utter reliance on God for help. We know these prayers are heard and answered, according to his wisdom and will. As St. Paul wrote, “my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). Paul was in a Roman prison at that time, undoubtedly deprived of many things that did not suddenly materialize with prayer. But his confidence in God’s provision, which accrues to us as followers of Jesus, means God will get us through, even when it means giving us the courage to just endure or go without.

Earnest prayer will also yield guidance about how to help others get through a hard time, when the needs are so many and so great that we may feel immobilized. One of my favorite biblical prayers applies here: “O our God...We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” (2 Chronicles 20:12). When we keep our eyes on God, He will show us how to “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

Listen for the specific way God may be prompting you to deliver his blessings to others. Look around, beyond your own difficulties, and pay close attention to hurting people. Attune yourself to those who are overwhelmed, in need, or discouraged. Offer your time, your service, and your resources: “...if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17).

Give the free yet priceless gift of prayer and encouragement, wrapped in patience and kindness: “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (James 5:16).

Take care of yourself, too. Our bodies and minds are overtaxed daily as we process trauma, assess continually changing situations, and solve problems. We invite physical injuries and mental mistakes if we neglect rest, nutrition, and hydration. Flight attendants instruct us in case of emergency to put our own oxygen mask on first, so that we are able to assist others. Likewise, we need to put our divine oxygen mask on, inhaling the breath of God – the Holy Spirit’s vitality – in order to help others: “He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might He increases strength” (Isaiah 40:29).

Even as we grapple with all the adversity, we “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Not easy, especially for those facing life-altering losses. But try to muster just three things to be thankful for each day, such as your life, your “daily bread”, and most of all, the companionship of our loving God who has promised, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5).

The healing process will continue long after the crisis peaks, or the electricity returns. Throughout each challenging day, remember Jesus’ sweeping assurance: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

With love in the Lord,
The Rev. Christine Maddux