

Proper 17a: 9/3/17
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*"Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.
 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer."*

Those are among the thirty or so exhortations – practical tips –
 on how to live together in God's love
 listed by St. Paul in rapid-fire succession in today's epistle
 to the folks in Rome.
 I'm guessing a lot of these were in evidence this week in Houston
 and throughout the path of hurricane Harvey.
 But none more than perseverance in prayer.

Here are three of the most striking instances of prayer
 I saw this week.

First – The lines.

Long lines of waterlogged people standing patiently,
 often in drizzle or worse.
 For what? Free food - shelter- medicine? NO.
 They were standing in line for nothing at all. But to volunteer.
 To give up a piece of their lives, their time,
 their worries about their own homes and loved ones
 in order to help their neighbors.
 In Houston and thereabouts this week,
 that's what prayer looked like.

Second – A young writer.

In my mind's eye I see her sitting at a cluttered desk,
 looking searchingly out the window as evening draws near
 in the hours before Harvey makes landfall.
 How would this compare to other storms she'd endured?
 Should she evacuate? Could she take her dog with her if she did?
 How would she find family and friends?

She did what is as prayer to her in such moments. She wrote a poem.
 She wrote this poem:

Hurricane Prayer

by Sara Cress

*I point my body to the sea
the night before landfall
and remember every unsettled dusk
I've lived before,
all named after kids down the street
I never liked:
Ike, Rita, Alicia, the redhead.
Each one steals a little piece,
a marble from the set,
leaving me incomplete.
Bites of skin gone
from a brown recluse in debris,
the horror of a snake
riding a raccoon to the creek,
and carpet,
so much carpet,
piled on curbs,
wet with an ocean
we never thought we'd meet.
Here I am again with a plea:
spare my friends,
spare my dumb-looking dog,
spare my family, please.
If you must take anything,
just take me.*

[breakingpoems.tumblr.com]

Third – and brace yourselves for this one, folks.
It's of a child age three – just a baby, really –
found alive clinging to/floating upon
her mother who *was not*.
To the heroes who rescued her, the little girl said,
“My mama was saying her prayers.”

And don't you know that desperate mother's deepest prayer
was answered the moment her child reached dry ground.

Perseverance in prayer
in and *for* Houston and everywhere devastated
by this thousand year flood.

Some of you may recall that before my vacation
I devoted two weeks' of sermons on silent, centering prayer.
I coached us in the practice of intentional silence,
demonstrated some postures, led some breathing exercises
and even suggested a mantra from that day's gospel.
And then I had us put it all together in three glorious moments
of silent meditation shared together right here.
I hope some of you've had a chance to continue this on your own.
For it's good. All good – as far as it goes.

We know there are times when sitting quietly, placidly, in prayer
just aren't possible.
And it is precisely in those times
that we will be most thankful for all the times we've cultivated deep,
regular, intentional stillness in prayer.

So on this Labor Day weekend,
on the cusp of another busy program year,
in the aftermath of Harvey with the threat of Irma looming,
and God only knows what else awaits any of us,
we need to be ready for most anything.
We need to be ready to take action grounded so deeply in prayer
that it is itself prayer.
Prayer which pushes us up and out to serve.
To die to our own needs and fears
in order to live
as the people God created us to be,
as the people God *needs* us to be.

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