

When God Speaks
Psalm 29

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It was a young adult Sunday school party back in the days when I could still be considered a young adult. It was supposed to be a pool party, but as people gathered, it started to rain. As a pastor, I don't like it to rain on people's parties. I always get the blame. "Howard," people say, "Can't you do something about the weather?" Normally I reply, "I am in sales not management." That day my explanation gave no satisfaction. So in an act of desperation I stepped up on a picnic table, stretched my hands to the heavens, and cried out in a loud voice "LET THE RAIN STOP." Well the words were hardly out of my mouth when lightning struck a transformer about two hundred yards away and the heavens roared in thunder. As I tried to calm my fears under that picnic table I vowed to God that I would never again give orders about the weather.

God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders
to perform,
He plants his footsteps on the sea, and rides
upon the storm.

The author of Psalm 29 had the weather on his mind. As the winds blew and the trees fell and the lightning flashed, his response is not "how awful" but "how awesome." He is not afraid. He is fascinated. What can we learn from this ancient writer that might help us through the storms of our own lives? I'd like to talk about that today!

When the storms of life are raging, WE CAN PRAY.

As I learned that day so long ago to pray is not to give orders to God, but to offer praise to the Almighty. Eugene Peterson translates the opening verses of the Psalm this way:

Bravo, God, Bravo!
Let the angels shout "Encore!"
In awe before God's glory and visible power
Stand at attention! Dress your best to honor him.

For the Psalmist a storm was an inspiration to cry "Glory." It was an opportunity to hear the seven-fold voice of the Lord in the thunder that shook the desert and the winds that turned the cedars of Lebanon into toothpicks.

The storm last Wednesday that swept Williamson County left our Bishop here in the dark trying to read appointments, but the storm for the Psalmist ushered him into the lightning power of God.

It's Father's Day. In a collection of tributes to Fathers, one son shares this story:

My father and I were hiking in a field one day when a sudden thunderstorm with high winds surrounded us. We found our way to an old abandoned house and went inside seeking protection from the storm. Once inside my Dad took my hand and prayed aloud to God saying, "Lord, take care of us." That is all he said, just five simple little words, "Lord, take care of us." After all of these years when I find myself in the storm of life, I go back to that simple prayer my father prayed that day in an abandoned house. Those five words continue to sustain me through every storm of life. When the storms of life are raging we can pray.

When the storms of life are raging, WE CAN PRIORITIZE.

Acts 27 tells the story of the storm-ridden ship carrying the prisoner Paul from Caesarea to Rome. According to the story, all aboard were lucky to be alive, or as Paul saw it, it was grace alone that brought them home. One thing the sailors had to do in the midst of the storm was to lighten the ship. They threw the cargo overboard. They threw the ship's tackle overboard. They even ate a final meal together and then threw the grain into the sea. Storms do that for us. They help us prioritize. How many times have you seen someone standing in the debris of their possessions thanking God for being alive?

If you want to give your father a real gift today, go home today and tell him what he did right. He already knows what he did wrong, so just go home and tell him what he did right. Sometimes when we get together with our sons and daughters-in-law, we talk about the meaningful things of life. One day their mother and I asked them to tell us the most helpful things they remembered about their teen years. Our son Brad said, "You remember that day I wrecked my car and you came to the accident scene and it was my fault. You took me in your arms and said, 'We can replace cars. We love you.'" That day I understood the meaning of priorities. When the storms are raging we can prioritize.

When the storms of life are raging, WE CAN STICK TOGETHER.

Some of the greatest examples of community I have ever witnessed have come in the wake of some devastating tornado or flood. Neighbors come out of their houses and talk to one another. Governments try to help without the interference of politics. In the wake of 9/11 people stood in line for hours to give blood. You don't have to work at raising money in a disaster. People just naturally want to help. The money comes from generous people trying hard to ease the suffering. The storms do that for us. They make us stick together.

Let me say to those of us determined to live our self-sufficient lives in gated communities, embedded in huge houses where family members seldom see one another, secluded on properties protected from any signs of the outside world—

God did not create humans for isolation. He created us for community. People all wrapped up in themselves make mighty small packages. Is it not time to come out of our hiding and join the human race? Robert Fulghum in his famous kindergarten quote says, "When you go out into the world hold hands and stick together."

Some of life's greatest lessons are learned in the storm. According to the Psalmist, God speaks in the storm. In the sunshine God whispers. In the storms, God shouts.

WHERE DO WE FIND GOD IN THE STORM?

When the storms of life are raging, where do we find God? God is in charge. *"God sits enthroned over the flood. The Lord is enthroned as king forever"* (Verse 10).

Following a long day of teaching, Jesus tries to catch a nap as the disciples navigate the boat to the other side of the lake. The story is told in Mark: 4. Suddenly there was trouble. The Sea of Galilee became engulfed in one of its famous and frequent storms. If you have ever visited there you may have experienced it. It was not uncommon at all for the Sea of Galilee to suddenly become turbulent. The waves were rocking the boat so badly that water was already spilling inside it. As the disciples fight for their lives, Jesus remains sound asleep. Finally the disciples shake Him awake saying, "Teacher, don't you even care that we are about to drown?" Awakened, Jesus rebukes the wind and challenges the disciples to have faith! They mumble to one another, *"Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey His voice?"*

Many times we, like the disciples, become "functional atheists." We believe in God but keep fighting the storms like we are all alone. Theoretically, we believe that God exists, but functionally we continue in the midst of life with the assumption that it is all up to us. There are many questions about a story like this. I don't know why Jesus waited to be asked before He decided to help, but I do know He was in the boat. I do know the winds and the waves obey His will when the Lord of the universe says, "Peace, be still."

Let us push this story a little further. No, He does not keep us from the storm. It rains on the just and the unjust. The floods rise on houses built on the rock and houses built on the sand. Believers are no more protected from trouble than nonbelievers. The difference lies only in Who's in the boat. God may let me get frightened enough to need Him, but then He comes close enough for me to see Him. God is in the boat with us in the storm.

God is in charge. The sooner I recognize that and the sooner I own that and the sooner I surrender to that, the better my life is going to be. In every arena, I need to understand that God is God and I don't have to be God in order to worship him.

Where is God in the storm? God is giving STRENGTH. Verse 11 says it clearly, *“The Lord gives strength to his people.”*

Isaiah had it right. They who hope in the Lord shall renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint.

This scripture took on new meaning for me when I learned what an eagle does in a storm. An eagle knows when the storm is approaching long before it breaks. So with that inner awareness, the eagle flies to some high spot and waits for the winds to come. When the wind hits, the eagle sets its wings so the wind will pick it up and lift it above the storm. While the storm rages below, the eagle is soaring above it. The eagle does not escape the storm. It simply uses the storm to lift it higher. Isaiah, somehow understanding that said, “They who wait on the Lord soar like eagles.” Where is God? When the storm hits He is giving strength to His people.

You, who great pain and sorrow bear, praise God and on Him cast your care! Oh, praise Him, praise Him. Praise God for the grace to carry on. Praise God for He will lead you home. Let those who have wings, praise the Lord.

Where is God? The Lord is providing PEACE. *“The Lord blesses his people with peace”* (Verse 11).

David Bloom was an energetic, popular, NBC news reporter who at age thirty-nine died of a pulmonary embolism while covering the war in Iraq. What was unreported in the press was Bloom’s deep abiding Christian faith. He sent this e-mail to his wife just days before his death. “I hope and pray the troops get out of this in one piece. But I am at peace. Here I am supposedly at the peak of my professional success, but I could frankly care less. It’s nothing compared to my relationship with you and my girls and Jesus Christ.” *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”*

There is in every hurricane a twenty to forty mile center of relative calm and unusual stillness. We call it the eye of the storm. It is peaceful there. In every pink slip that comes at work, in every trouble that strikes at home, in every disease that threatens to do you in, in every circumstance that causes great concern, there is a place of quiet rest and unusual peace, near to the heart of God. I’ve watched hundreds of people find it. Go for the eye of the storm. It is the only place to ride out a storm. The Hebrews called it Shalom. May God be your Shalom.

When the storms of life are raging and doubt reaches
my way,
Remind me of your love Lord, to keep my fears away.
When all I see is failure and mountains hard

to climb,
Just whisper in my ear O Lord, that you are still
sunshine.
This life may disappoint me and so may people too,
Lord show me your faithfulness and keep me true to
you.
When tears fill my eyes, Lord, and I'm seemingly
blind,
Walk with me, precious Jesus, and ease my tired
mind.
Take me by the hand Lord, when roads are washing
out,
Provide me your protection, and keep me from all
doubt.
When I'm getting really tired from struggling day and
night,
Hold me tight dear Jesus, be my guiding light.

Yes, Jim, Judy, Joe, Julia, and you who need to hear him most...

GOD STILL SPEAKS IN THE STORM.

