

**RECREATING “NORMAL” –**  
***STEPS FOR ‘THRIVING’ INSTEAD OF JUST***  
***‘SURVIVING’ DURING THE FLOODS OF LIFE.***

Hasn't it been a blessing to hear from the whole stable of preachers here at Legacy, in recent weeks as they have preached on their OT and NT Staff Favorite stories? It has been an unintended and unexpected blessing for me to have a break from preaching during that time. It has allowed me to respond to many of the flood related situations, and for that I am grateful to Peter, Ernie, Walter and Marvin. God bless you all.

Last week was Annual Conference for the Dakota's United Methodists. I received permission to miss by the Bishop and Dist. Superintendent; in order to attend to flood related issues here at home. But a number of my colleagues gave me a hard time for not being there, (which is not unusual – them giving me a hard time – or me finding excuses not to be there!). My excuse to them this year was: “Hey, we're having a 500 year flood here – I'm not sure how long I'm going to live; but I didn't want to miss the opportunity to use the flood as an excuse to get out of AC!

I shouldn't probably make light of this tragic event; but sometimes a little humor is exactly what we need to keep going. In that light I want to encourage all of you to consider using the enclosed invitation postcards to invite your flood fighting family and friends who may not have a church home; to join us in July to take a “light look” at some of the silly things I learned growing up on the farm.

Now to the important business of the day; Listen and read along as we consider a “flood” event in the life of the disciples. We're going to see if we can't find some practical steps for “Thriving” instead of just “Surviving” during our own floods of Life:

*One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and started out. As they sailed across, Jesus settled down for a nap. But soon a fierce storm came down on the lake. The boat was filling with water, and they were in real danger.*

*The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves. The storm stopped and all was calm! Then he asked them, "Where is your faith?"*

*The disciples were terrified and amazed. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "When he gives a command, even the wind and waves obey him!" Luke 8:22-25*

I know that not all of us are directly affected by this flood event; but my nearest best guess from conversations I've had in the past month might put the families from our church who are directly affected at about 22. I hear of more almost every week. Even though you may not be facing these flood waters directly – you may be facing any of a hundred other “flood events” in your life. We've had 3 funerals in the past few days – one of a still born precious little girl. We've had 2 potentially “troublesome” pregnancies during this same time. We've had other deaths, sicknesses, health scares and concerns. We've already begun to see some negative effects of the flood on already strained relationships between husbands and wives. I've heard many complaints, criticisms, and condemnations from members of our community – that I predicted a few weeks ago – and I'm certain will increase in coming weeks. This is a tough time for many of us – flood related or otherwise – and we might call them all “The Floods of Life”. So watch with me now a video shot just recently by a member of our community to get a sense of what we are up against, and what we're going through. (watch Sam Sprynczynatyk's video)

The disciples launched out one evening for a jaunt across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus fell asleep in the keel of the boat – a storm came quickly upon them – and they

panicked. Let's consider some steps to get through our own Floods of Life from this little story.

### 1. **NO ONE WINS THE BLAME GAME**

I'm sure it was on Thaddeus's Job Description somewhere: to check the weather forecast before launching out on any sea going adventure. Let's blame Thaddeus for not giving us better information. Or maybe it was Judas's job to secure a boat big enough to handle any storms, and in his typical penny pinching "cheap-skake" approach to life – he chartered this dinky little dingy that was now going to get them all killed. Let's blame Judas...or someone...anyone else. Blaming someone is a popular pastime played often in times of tragedy, turmoil, transition, or trauma.

We might blame the doctors for not doing a better job of seeing the consequences more clearly, or an employer for not detecting better the effects of the down-turn in the economy, or a spouse for not providing more adequately for some unmet need in our life. We're fairly accomplished players in this game called "Blaming" – but nobody wins.

The Army Corp of Engineers seem to be the popular subject of most complaining blamers these days – though any government official will often do in a pinch. Any leader who is thrust onto the platform during times like these has his/her neck extended; and is prone to receive any and all accusations and blame – but what purpose does it really serve?

Does somehow being able to fix the blame...fix the problem? No, unfortunately not – thus it's futility. And have any of you noticed that even God is not above sharing some of the accusations of blame; during this...and many other kinds of 'flood' events? I was intrigued by this game of blaming God via Facebook by a renowned leader of our

community who was taking to task another of our community leaders who is very public about his faith.

Mother Nature is easier to blame – sort of like Santa Claus for not bringing us everything we want, or the Easter Bunny for not seeing his shadow and leaving us with 20 more months of winter...I think I messed that up – but you get the point?

God can handle our blaming – but situations like this flood, and many others in life just happen; blame God if you like; but it often does nothing to alter the situation or even address the problem – so let's stop with the blame game – nobody wins!

## 2. **MAKE POSITIVE ASSUMPTIONS**

*“Master, Master, wake up – we’re all going to drown!”*

The disciples made an assumption didn't they? They didn't know what was going to happen, but from their fabled adventures on the high seas of the holy land unsuccessfully fishing; they thought they knew how to read these storms – and they were sure they were going to drown. I guess they didn't want Jesus to sleep through their corporate demise, so they awakened him.

When we don't know the future, and we think we have to make some judgment about it, usually in some ill-fated attempt to control it – we most often make negative assumptions – don't we? Why? Are we just basically pessimistic – or is there something more sinister at work here? As a principle of life – I think we who say we are followers of Jesus ought to make more positive assumptions especially about the things in life we don't know! When you don't know the outcome – then choose the positive assumption instead of the negative one.

There is no denying the potentially negative impact of this flood event on many people living in the communities of Burleigh and Morton County; and up and down this

whole river system – my sister and her family have been out of their home in Sioux City for 3 weeks. But I couldn't help but think about these two images from the great flood of 1997 in Grand Forks: the downtown helplessly on fire and the huge piles of rubbish lining the boulevards in front of every house affected by that flood. But guess what? Most people would agree that downtown GF is better today, and most every person mowed some lovely grass on those same boulevards this week! Let's be careful how we assess value to the future over which we have no control – and in the meantime – we may as well choose positive assumptions over negative ones – I think that's what people of faith ought to do!

### 3. **COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS AS YOU CONSIDER YOUR LOSSES**

I'm not sure what "blessings" the disciples may have counted at that moment; they just knew their only hope of survival lay sleeping somewhere in their stinking sinking ship – so they woke him up.

It may be small consolation, especially in times like these – but there is always someone worse off than you. I'm not saying that to make you feel bad for feeling bad about your circumstances or situations; but to remind you that you are not alone!

All of us go through hard times – well most of us do anyway! And when those who are not accustomed to suffering do so – it may be good to remind them (us) that there are people who are suffering real tragedy as a part of their daily lives!

As I said to you quoting Barb Emery the first Sunday we gathered after this fight began – "No one should die from this event – and beyond that – it's all stuff!" We are still not looking for bodies of loved ones sucked into a tornado and missing some 4 weeks later. We are not running for our lives on the streets of Libya, or Syria or Yemen.

Yes, we are watching our homes be devastated by rising waters, but so are fellow humans watching theirs burn to the ground in Arizona and New Mexico.

We most often at times like these cry “Why us – why now – why me”? My answer (trite and uncaring as it at first glance might appear) is: Why not us? Who do we think we are? Do we think we live such special or spiritual lives that we are immune to the ravages of nature, or the unintended consequences of man-made decisions, made long before us, that have provided us many years of pleasure and enjoyment – but when once in a great while – we are reminded that we are not in control - we go off the deep end crying about the injustice! I’m sorry for people’s loss of valuable stuff – I’m sorry for the interruption in our tranquil and serene summer life in ND. I’m truly sorry for all the mess and devastation caused by this flood – but we are still alive – and most of us have way too much stuff; and most of our stuff is way too important!

#### 4. **REESTABLISH REGULAR ROUTINES**

The principle of this point is simple: When you don’t know what else to do – do what you know. Wake up Jesus! It had become part of their regular routine since beginning the adventure of following this Messiah – that the disciples would call on him, come to him, utilize his skills and abilities to help them out of their situations. So that is what they do now – they wake him up and ask him to help.

In the early days of this fight I was struck with the overwhelming sense that people had no idea what to do. Should we move the furniture, sandbag the house, and how high? Should we move out or stick it out, should we help ourselves or help someone

else? Confusion reigns when routines are busted. So as a practical step in recreating “Normal” begin as much as you can to reestablish regular routines.

At times of significant death, I’ve counseled many people – “at this time when you don’t know what to do – then do what you know”. Go to church, pray, read your Bible, share your life and pain with trusted loved ones and friends. It is not a denial of reality to try and recreate some sense of normal even in the midst of the flood; it’s not inappropriate to laugh even in the funeral home; it is not even a survival technique – it is a ‘thriving’ technique.

This is especially important for children – and why most parents are so happy when school starts again – they get back in a routine. Well, our routine has been disrupted, so we have to work extra hard to get it back. And remember “normal” may be out of reach for a while, or forever – so create a “New Normal” that includes those valued things that sustained your life before – they may well sustain your life now.

#### 5. **MAKE NEW MEMORIES**

Jesus asked the disciples an interesting question: “Where’s your faith?” Do you think he did that to slap them with their unbelief – or was he inviting them to apply their new found way of living to this impending and potentially tragic event fast approaching? I think the later, and I think he does the same for us.

Most of the lamenting of loss I’ve heard has to do with the stuff of memories – the experiences we’ve created and enjoyed with family and friends, the places we’ve lovingly built and nurtured, invested in and even built by hand, the things we accumulated over years of collecting, traveling, even inherited. All those potential

losses take with them the memories of events and experiences of life that we have shared with those we most deeply loved...or have they?

At Susan's suggestion I asked Doug Diehl, my friend, one of your former pastors and Dist. Superintendent, who was a pastor in Grand Forks at the time of their flood of a lifetime; to share with me some of his messages after the event. I read them all, they are profound. In one of his sermons he said: "Memories are not contained in the "stuff" of life – but in the living of life!" He is right.

Our memories will live beyond the pictures that may be lost. Our memories are not in the "stuff" or houses or property – they are in the experiences, the living, of our lives! And just think of all the new memories we now have an opportunity to make! I'm just saying...

I hope this message has not felt condescending at a time of great need in our community – it was designed (inspired, maybe) to give us hope, and some directive steps for learning how to "Thrive" at this time when so many, seem content, to settle for surviving. Jesus helped the disciples – and they came out all right – and he's not sleeping now – I think we'll be alright too!

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