

Creation Care Series - Crisis Can Create Caring Communities

Next month will mark the 3rd anniversary of Katrina. At least 689,000 homes and businesses across Mississippi and Louisiana—including medical facilities and nursing homes—were without electric power for extended period of time (Superdome). Homes were destroyed and thousands of people had to be evacuated. The number of individuals killed as a result of the hurricane and subsequent flooding was in the thousands. Thousands of articles have been cited, many Books have been written, numerous movies and documentaries have been made. Apologies and Promises have been made by politicians, scientist, ministers, and engineers to name a few. The devastation of Katrina is still being felt in New Orleans and other Southern communities with our country as we seek to rebuild. Interestingly, one thing that has become clear and everyone seems to agree is that there was a human-made crisis long before the environmental crisis of Hurricane Katrina – in the book *Rebuilding Urban Places Areas after Disasters* the author writes -

All too often, we do the wrong thing because we ignore the facts; we ignore the knowledge that we already have. The tragedy – more accurately, the injustice – of Katrina and similar wounds is that it follows directly from the fact that we knew things that could have made a difference.”¹

- **We know about environmental threats, civil engineering & city planning; regional economic developments and management of risk**
- **We know about community formations**
- **Geographic Informational Systems governmental and bureaucratic inefficiencies**

We knew, we were warned of the crisis yet we ignored the warnings, we were warned of the crisis yet we willingly ignored what the prophet Jeremiah calls the “road signs” along the way of life that are telling us of a crisis , you know the signs don’t you - caution, yield, stop, dead-end, lane ends in 1 mile...

I would surmise in the conversation of Creation Care and/or Katrina – We know (4-5 weeks if not before as it relates to Katrina) the things that could make a difference to not only our quality of our lives but the quality of life of future generations and around the world

- ***We know* that the one overwhelming commonality of all environmental crisis (global warming, green house effect, polluted streams, landfills, food shortages) can be traced back to our human activity and our subsequent over consumption.**
- ***We know* Sabbath rest is part and parcel of the will of God for all creation yet we do not allow the land to rest, therefore much of our natural resources such as *topsoil*, is lost for generations, we drill for ***oil 24/7 on coast lines*** impacting**

¹ *Rebuilding Urban Places Areas After Disasters – Lessons from Hurricane Katrina* Pg. viii – ix

aquatic life to feed our gasoline addiction, we breed cattle and chicken with fast growing *growth hormones (eat less meat)*

- **We know** that One billion people lack access to safe drinking water.
- **We know** that today, 50-100 species, species, of plants or animals will go extinct –in our lifetime - the cause of such extinctions? Human activity.
- **We know** that the he average morsel of food travels 1,200 miles to reach our plate's.....and if you didn't know NOW you know!

The reality is that **We knew** about Katrina and the pending crisis possibility (Cobbs Creek here in Philly) – we knew and when it happened all we could do is watch from a panoramic distance. If the issue isn't ignorance – perhaps the issue is apathy? Such a thought is difficult to navigate in the middle of vacation season! Yet the facts remain. Is there hope for us? I say yes! If we take serious the model found in our scripture reading today - The story of Jonah gives us wonderful hope for what a people dependant on God can do. The Jonah account has many layers of meaning and reflection:

- It is a story of disobedience by Jonah in the midst of God's patience and faithfulness
- It is a story of God's Love and how God's love extends even to our 'so called' enemies
- It is stories of how God will accomplish God's will.....to name a few

But the account of Nineveh at its most basic level is a powerful reminder that it is often in the midst of crisis we find powerful examples of caring communities. Crisis can create caring communities. You see crisis, or impending disaster, nor the effect of disaster has to be the end of the story – how we respond can have a tremendous impact on the eventual outcome of our crisis....Amen?

We see this powerfully illustrated in our scripture text where we find the key actor in this drama is named Jonah - who like the upcoming Will Smith Movie "*HANCOCK*" is a "reluctant hero". We read in Chapter 1 that God similar to our study of John the Baptist instructed Jonah to preach the Gospel of repentance. Yet unlike John the Baptist who boldly and obediently would go and preach and baptize, even if it meant death Jonah said no...I rather not, I'll pass. Yet we read that from chapter 1 to 3 Jonah "is strongly encouraged" by God to change his mind and go. Our reading in Chapter 3 says that Jonah finally obeys and goes into the city – a city that would take 3 days to walk through. His message was seemingly quite simple yet prophetic –

He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."

Though we do not know for sure, as to what disaster awaited the city of Nineveh – be it natural disaster or an armed enemy by force, - we know that the crisis and the prediction of total devastation was a reality of such magnitude that it was believable to the 120,000 (this is probably only men!) that as a people, as a nation they responded with full fledged repentance – so much so that when the King heard what was going on his country he joined in the worshipping festivities...the populace dictated to royalty there expectation of worship! So often we get caught up with the Jonah, the Whale, three days in the belly, his bad attitude and the rather unorthodox ending in Chapter 4....and we fail to see sheer miracle of the city of Nineveh that upon recognizing the crisis in which they found themselves....

5 The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. 6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust..... Jonah proclaimed that - “everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.”

The Bible tells us that Nineveh was wicked, heathen and a warring enemy of God and the Jewish nation of Israel– it is clear the Ninevites were bad news. There was nothing about them that could possibly recommend them for favor in God's sight. Yet, God sent His prophet Jonah to call them to repentance – right relationship with God and with one another and their neighbors. During a time when the children of Israel’s as a nation was rejecting God’s direction, we read in our lesson today of a people who our Lord was using a prophet of Israel to offer salvation to a city of idol worshippers – quite ironic. Here’s the miracle that we miss – during a difficult time of crisis we find a people, the so called heathen, provide for all the world to see - a model of not only individual repentance but of corporate repentance leading to what I am naming a caring community where everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence! Nineveh, not Jerusalem, nor Judea, nor Corinth, nor Ephesus (any other NT book) nor the 7 churches in Revelations can claim to have fully and collectively walked in our God’s promise given to King Solomon’s: That....

14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 15 Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. 16

The Ninevites – heathen, the enemy, the idol worshippers, knowing or unknowingly walked right into the promises of God! In the context of our scripture lesson today we see clearly that when hardship comes and they will, when crisis comes and it will, when the challenges of life knock us down on our proverbial backside we have two choice it seems to me – the Jonah model and the Nineveh model in how we will respond to crisis.

Jonah Model – is always asking “what about me” or deferring to saying “I didn’t know” For Jonah during the time of crisis it was clear, look out for himself, refusing to extend the grace that God has given to him to other. In fact the text doesn’t state this – but I do not believe it is big jump to say that not only was Jonah resistant to being placed in the very presence of the Ninevites – it is fair to say that Jonah was praying against them! Lord do them in, Lord hurt them, Lord reject them....

- Camping trip – people arrived at the adjoining camp site 3:00 AM. They were loud and obnoxious and I got mad and wanted God to do “something” to them. In essence I like Jonah was praying against these people! But after while I begin to say to myself watch your anger, your thought Leonard, what if they showed up in church!)

Nineveh Model – is that our crisis can create wonderful, thriving caring communities. Recognizes that in the midst of crisis is an opportunity for the Spirit of God to position each of us to receive as well give care, to receive as well as give comfort....because it is in crisis we are best equipped to notice that a caring community is

being created right here and right now. In other words out of crisis we read in our text that a faithful community came about, a healthier community came about, a healed community came about, a less violent community came about, a righteous community—perhaps a city of brotherly and sisterly love where Shalom was common place?

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. 5For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 2 Cor. 1:1-5

1Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

This is at the heart of what I desire to communicate this morning is that in the midst of whatever the crisis we as people of faith are called to pause and position ourselves to receive care, to pause to give care – our relationship with God, one another, and yes even our enemy. But there's more..... as we have been learning as it relates to creation care is that we are also called to care for All of God's creation. **Why? Because while we were yet sinners – Christ died for us....In the midst of our crisis (of sin) God cared and continues to care for us. Amen. While we were lost, while we were like Nineveh lost or perhaps when we were like Jonah with a hardened heart God cared and continues to care for us.** In our conversation of Creation Care – we are in a crisis. And like the children of Nineveh we have the Jonah's of this world warning us that we have to repent and turn from our evil ways or our crisis will turn into devastation of Biblical proportion.

Many of you are aware that prior to me becoming a pastor here at OCMC in 2000 I was a banker in both Montgomery County and here in Philadelphia. Right around the time that I was transitioning out of my responsibilities in banking into my role of pastorate was a time of crisis in the world. At this point and time in our history many people grew in anticipation of the pending reality and what many felt would be a computer crisis of epidemic proportion named Y2K. It is rather difficult 8 years post Y2K for some of us to recall the high level of anxiety of that time that was expressed in both secular and religious circles. Unfortunately the reaction to the crisis was quite the same in the church and out – in the midst of crisis look out for ones self....Jonah model.

In the book ***"Beyond the Suffering"*** (A Nineveh Model) which chronicles the African American from horror of abduction from the Ivory Coast, journeying through the so called Middle Passage that killed nearly 77% of the human cargo – disease, suicide or malnutrition – and 200 year of waiting and wanting deliverance and the authors wonderfully frames that as a people, strangers, slaves, beaten, broken, raped – crisis yet we developed into a caring community – that cared for our souls while caring for one another –

- **Sustaining – it's normal to hurt**
- **Healing – It's possible to hope**
- **Reconciling – it's horrible to sin but wonderful to be forgiven**
- **Guiding – It's Supernatural (God led) to mature.**

Today may we be reminded that we are being called to become the caring communities of God's creations – Nineveh Model. Collectively we are the caregivers, the trustees of all God's creation. The world around is watching us as people of faith during our Environmental Crisis. Today we read in our text today – that a nation, a people, a people who didn't even know God – saw that their circumstance was not as good as it seemed. They like us today *knew*..... that a day in the not to distant future was coming in which their military might, their commerce or market portfolio, nor their progressive educational endeavors were going to keep them from a crisis that could destroy them. And their response was the same of as those who gathered around John the Baptist who said REPENT – change your ways turn away from worshipping idols, turn away you're your prideful ways, turn away from abusing your power, turn away from sin/evil and turn towards God and then collectively we as a people will passionately love God and passionately love and care for one another and the world around us. May our response this day be:

Vs. 18 “What should we do?”

Is this not our call my brothers and sisters here at OCMC. – we know! Our desire is to be that caring community – what MLK named the Beloved Community where people from all nations come to not only worship passionately, but care (pray and act) for one another passionately, care (pray and act) for our given community passionately, care (pray and act) for the world, AND YES, CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION (small steps next week) May future generations upon looking back as we did today with the book of Jonah come to see to us not as prominent individuals seeking to draw attention to ourselves – rather may they see a people, a royal priesthood, of people who like the Ninevites sought to be a caring community who collectively turned from our evil ways – we turned and fixed our eyes on JesusGuide my feet, hold my hand,

Central Theme – In the midst of our crisis we take time to care because in the midst our crisis (of sin) God cared and continues to care for us.