

For months we have prepared for this weekend of remembrance of the Great Storm that devastated this island city 100 years ago. Local, regional, and national media have done a remarkable job of telling the story of America's greatest natural disaster. There have been photographs, eye witness accounts, scientific reports, historical books, and novels. The entire world has been made more aware of the significance of the storm and the people of this community.

This morning we remember all who perished along with those who survived to rebuild Galveston, especially those who were communicants of Trinity Church. When we think of those who died, we are reminded of the frailty of human life in the face of the elements. God made us to be the crowning glory of creation endowed with the power to rule over it and subdue it. And yet, the 1900 storm is a painful reminder that we humans are not always fully in charge. I will not treat you to any further descriptions of the incredible death and destruction that covered this island after the storm. We've all seen and heard enough to be convinced. The wind and the sea might obey Jesus, but they certainly didn't pay a great deal of attention to those who lived here before us that weekend in September one hundred years ago.

You see, the way God created things placed human beings at the top of the pecking order of creation. When we submit to the lower orders of creation and place ourselves at an inferior position in the order of things, we undermine the plan of God. That is the basis of idolatry – submission to the elements, to wind, rain, and fire. A little idol represents some facet of creation to which we assign power over us. Then, there are those times when we don't exactly submit to the lower orders of creation, but are overwhelmed by them. To be defeated by draught so that our crops wither, to be overtaken by an illness, to be inundated by a hurricane is to find ourselves in the humiliating position of having our position in the scheme of things taken away from us. To submit to the elements is a bad thing, but to be forced into submission is even worse in many ways. Falling down is a humiliating and painful experience.

God has placed within the human breast a heart that is determined to prevail. The response of the survivors of the storm is a reminder of that. They faced the death and destruction and somehow, by the grace of God, summoned the inner resources to start the painstaking process of rebuilding. Their success is a testimony to the conviction that God provides us with everything it takes to overcome tragedies, surmount obstacles, and change the way things are in meaningful and purposeful ways. Falling down is a humiliating and painful experience. But life is not simply about falling down, it is about getting up!

The prophet said, "Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear. Here is your God. . . God will come and save you.'" Eyes shall be opened, ears unstopped, weak legs made strong, and the speechless sing for joy. Life is about getting up, moving ahead, overcoming.

When we consider how those who came here before us responded to the defeat that was delivered to them, what do we have to say for ourselves? When we are inconvenienced or experience a temporary setback, how do we respond? With faith or with fear? With bitterness or with blessing? With surrender or with perseverance? You must see the sad irony in the hand-wringing over whether or how to build more convention space while we are hearing and reading stories daily about the rebuilding of this entire city – the grade raising, the planting of trees and oleanders, the restoration of the transportation system. Is this how we treat the legacy passed along to us by those who got up and did what needed doing after the storm?

After the storm, the issue was no longer whether the city would survive. The issue became whether the city would thrive. And that remains the issue today. Will we thrive? Or, will we be content merely to survive? Will we settle for getting by? Or will we reach for loftier goals?

Christ, the healer confronts us in today's gospel. People were "astounded beyond measure" because he made lives which were broken whole again. When we consider the legacy of healing he has passed on to us, what do we have to say for ourselves? Are we continuing that ministry? In John's gospel, he promised that his followers would do even greater works than he did. Are we? In many respects, we are. There are wonderful hospitals filled with compassionate, skilled health care professionals and scientists. There are programs for the hungry and the homeless and people who suffer all sorts of problems. Much good is being done as an extension of Christ's healing life and we can thank God. But is it enough? Can we sit back and feel content? Is the world likely to say of us what they said of Christ about doing all things well?

What about the young man who snatched the purse from my friend's arm on the Strand last Wednesday night? How about the girl who may not be able to complete her education because she has a child to raise and no husband? Are race relations in this city better or worse than they were 100 years ago? Are the loving hands of Trinity Parish touching all the lives they can? Until we are happy with the answers to these and similar questions, there is work for us to do. As long as there are still kids strung out on drugs or abused or neglected, as long as there are still people sitting on death row in Huntsville, as long as there are still women and men who do not know that God loves them enough to die for them, the Church has barely scratched the surface of the healing and redemptive work God has called us to do.

When the people of Galveston faced their grief after the storm, God supplied the comfort. When the people of Galveston faced the daunting task of clearing the debris and rebuilding, God supplied the energy and the perseverance. When the people of Galveston decided to stand up and go on living, God supplied the vision of a better day than ever before. God always supplies what we need when what we are doing is right and good and great.

When we look at the ongoing task of building a great city at one with itself, when we see the monumental undertakings in education, employment, and family life, when we think of the challenge of meeting the needs of children and youth, don't you know that God will supply what we need when we are doing what is good and great? God always does.

So, mindful of the prophet's promise of God's providence, taking the example of our Lord who did so much so well, and mindful of the sacrifice of those courageous ones who resolved to rebuild Galveston a century ago, let us resolve today to handle the legacy entrusted to us with greater care. For if we are not careful, the social ills of our time will wreck more havoc among us than the Great Storm, little-mindedness in leadership will leave us more vulnerable to disaster than those who were suddenly swept away by the tidal surge, small visions fail us when what is needed is decisions courageous enough to make the defining difference between thriving or merely surviving as a city and as a community of faith.

When the storm killed 15 communicants of this church, our forbears buried them and cared for their loved ones because it was what needed doing. When the surge knocked down that south wall over there, they rebuilt it because that was what needed doing. Now, in our day, there are things that need doing. As God provided divine supplies to those who went before us, so may God grant us those things we need to be the people we were meant to be and do the things that need doing, and, like our Savior, may God empower us to do them well.