



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“HURRICANE MATTHEW”

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 51:2

*This sermon was preached by Millie Garrett on Youth Sunday, February 5, 2017
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Does anyone need a slightly used buoy? Because I have quite a few. Hurricane Matthew dropped them off in my yard when he made a visit to Charleston this fall. The Tuesday before hurricane Matthew hit, I left for a school field trip to the mountains of South Carolina, to a little camp called Green River Preserve. We got to the mountains and everything went as planned. We swam, played, and laughed. That night we enjoyed a campfire, told stories, and had cookies and milk. Later that evening, my teachers stood up to make an announcement. They told us that we would leave the next morning at 4:30 to return to Charleston because of hurricane Matthew. They thought it was better for us to evacuate with our families. So, our planned four day field trip to the mountains became a 12 hour excursion. We awoke the next morning at 4:30, which to a bunch of teenagers felt harsh, and got back on a bus to go home.

When I arrived back home I was happy to see my mom but I was really, really sad because we had to leave the mountains and this fun field trip. My mom told me we were immediately leaving for Greenville to evacuate. We packed our cars and left, me in a car with my mom, dog, and 2 guinea pigs, my brother and grandmother in the other car. The fun 8 hour drive to Greenville left us tired, but we arrived in time to celebrate my older brother's 16th birthday! At the time, I wondered if this week could get any worse: my brother's birthday not really being celebrated, my short trip to Green River Preserve, my dad in New York and not with us, and my house and Charleston in jeopardy.

Then I stopped for a second and realized all these great people around me: my family, our wonderful hosts, former First (Scots) family, the Crocketts, and our good friends, the McKenzies, who evacuated to the same house. I thought to myself, all I had to do was open my eyes; these people had bad things all around them but they still put smiles on their faces and laughed. It hit me: I need to have stronger faith and belief in God, believe that He will care for us and believe that I will be a better person than when I started this tumultuous week. Those next few days in Greenville were really fun! I toured Clemson, hung out at the mall and ate some amazing meals! I was sad to say goodbye.

On the car ride home to Charleston, I was hopeful that God had protected my city. When I saw my house, I knew that all of my praying had worked and I was so relieved. God had just given our yard, house, and cars a good washing. In spite of the apprehension, the traveling, the good and bad times, I realized that God was trying to teach me a lesson. The scripture that I believe best describes this trying time is Psalms 51:2, “Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” I interpret this scripture to mean that we are all sinful, but God will cleanse us of our wrong doings and give us a fresh start.

I would like to close with a poem written by my Great-Great-Grandmother, Louise Phinizy Broyles Barrett. I think she wonderfully captured the joy of God's renewal we experience every time it rains.

*"I saw God wash the world last night
With his sweet showers,
And then when morning came
I saw him hang it out to dry.
He washed each slender blade of grass,
And every trembling tree,
He flung his showers among the hills,
And swept the rolling sea.
The white rose is a purer white,
The red a deeper red,
Since God washed every fragrant face,
And put them all to bed.
There's not a bird, there's not a bee
That wings along the way,
But what is cleaner, bird or bee
Than it was yesterday.
I saw God wash the world last night,
Would God had washed me as clean
Of all my dust and dirt
As that old brown oak tree."*



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“WEATHER THE STORM”

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 7:24-27

This sermon was preached by Manning Snyder on Youth Sunday, February 5, 2017 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

When the youth voted weather as the theme for Youth Sunday, my mind began to race. I envisioned a rainy day, umbrellas in hand, raincoat on, and the congregation rushing to church, not only to stay dry, but also, of course, eagerly anticipating Youth Sunday. While I'm sure the congregation would be equally excited regardless of the weather, undeniably, the weather plays a role in everyday life. It can excite us, or make us tired or drowsy, or sometimes it makes us stop and admire the beauty of our surroundings. Famous preachers talk about stopping in the monotonous routine of life, and to observe the beautiful nature in this world. As one quote puts it, ““We could all take a lesson from the weather. It pays not attention to criticism.” However, weather is noted countless times in the Bible—ranging from the story Noah's Ark to parting the Red Sea. Weather is related to our faith in our daily life as well. As Matthew 5:43 says, ““You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **44** But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”” While many believe that rain represents gloom and desolation, as Christians, rain should also be considered a gift from God, as rain gives us a cleaner ocean, plants and agriculture to flourish, etc. According to Open Bible, there are 58 verses in the Bible dedicated to rain. And the sun is mentioned over 100 times. Scientifically, it is proven that weather does in fact affect your mood, although in a miniscule way. Lack of sunlight leads to seasonal affective disorder, despite being uncommon, it drops your mood levels and well-being during colder months. And in literature, the winter is usually categorized as a motif of death and depression. Natural disasters such as tornadoes, flood tsunamis, have a significant impact on mental health, as they create chaos and turmoil following the disaster.

I remember growing up in the First (Scots) community, attending Sunday School, singing hymns, and acting out Bible stories. Weather was also a major theme in the Bible, noted many times in the teachings. One of the most famous stories involving weather in the Bible is the story of the man who built his house on sand, and the other man who built his house on the rock. The scripture, Matthew 7:24, reads, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. **25** And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.” It is important that you build your house “on the rock” so that you can weather any storm sent your way. Even today, and in the past month, Charleston has been going through legal battles—specifically the Mother Emanuel AME church shooting or the Michael Slager trial. The Charleston community came together after the Emanuel AME church and the families' victims of the Emanuel AME shooting met each day during trial for prayer, Scripture reading, and hymn singing. Presbyterian pastor Eric Skidmore said, “They set up shop

in a large room on the third floor of the courthouse, one floor down from the courtroom. They created an altar and gathered each morning for prayer and Scripture reading, often from the Psalms, the assembly including the husbands and wives, the children and the grandchildren of those killed at Mother Emanuel. Most days, someone from the Emanuel group would break into song, so if someone got off the elevator and walked down the hall, “you’d hear 80 people in the back room singing hymns.” As a congregation, we can reflect on these actions. Whatever event, whether small or large, cannot break a united, loving church community.

Your relationship with God can be categorized by weather as an analogy. When you commit a sin, or are struggling with different parts of your life, it could be like a hurricane, a scary part of your life that will hopefully weaken over time. Or the sun can “illuminate” your relationship with God. As one quote puts it, “Wherever you go, always bring your own sunshine.” So I issue a challenge—to “clothe yourself” with the tools to grow in your relationship with God—in prayer, scripture, song, a congregation, etc. There will always be stormy weather and events in life, but as Christians, we should be confident, because God will always be there—sunshine or rain, hail or snow, tornado or earthquake. Amen.



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“WEATHER CHANGES, BUT THE OUTCOME IS THE SAME”

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25

*This sermon was preached by Rhett Tuemler on Youth Sunday, February 5, 2017
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

The stories of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee read today are remarkable. Remarkable because 3 different people were so impressed by what happened that they all wrote it down for us to read. Remarkable because they all wrote them at different times, from different locations, and with their own recollections of how it went down. I'm sure that all of you have had the experience of speaking with a friend or new acquaintance and exchanging a story of a significant event you shared, or witnessed. Perhaps it was a story that began with, "Remember when...?" Not long ago while sitting with friends on the bleachers at school, we all began excitedly telling the same story to each other at once. After the story had been told we realized that while many of the details of our stories differed a bit, the outcome of our stories was the same.

In the stories of Jesus calming the storm, the disciples were experiencing a scary weather story. My scary weather story happened after a great day of skiing during which over 2 feet of light, powdery snow fell. The scary part didn't begin until we began making our way home. We all piled into the car for a trip of about 17 miles over heavily snow covered, winding, West Virginia mountains. Despite their best efforts, the snow plows had failed to keep up; snow drifted on the strong winds, and avalanches from the steep hillsides closed some roads, even crashed through some buildings. I had been in bad weather and on bad roads before, but I was scared even though I'd made it through before. The disciples were scared, even though they were most professional fishermen who'd experienced rough weather before while on the water. They had seen Jesus perform miracles. They said they believed he was who he said he was; he was right there in the boat with them, but still they believed that they were doomed and he didn't care. Although He was right there with them, they didn't have the faith that his presence alone would see them through the bad weather.

My friends and I all told our story a little differently, but we all finished it the same way. My brothers and sister may tell the story of that snowy day and the drive home somewhat differently, but we all arrived home safely. Matthew, Mark, and Luke told the story of Jesus calming the storm a little differently, but the outcome was the same.

Bad weather is a great metaphor for hard times in our lives. So when bad weather hits, will we freak out like the disciples, or will we have faith that God will see us through? The outcome is really always the same. He is always with us no matter the weather.



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“UNPREDICTABLE FORECAST”

Scripture Lesson: Acts 27:13-26

This sermon was preached by Megan Holderness on Youth Sunday, February 5, 2017 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

In the Holderness household, there is one rule that reigns true when it comes to the weather: meteorologists are not to be trusted. Well, this is what mom always says anyway and there is no arguing with mom, that's for sure. Now, I always laugh when she talks about her hesitant attitudes towards meteorologists, always taking their advice with a grain of salt. I mean, they do earn a degree in this field. And plus, nowadays with cutting-edge technology and all the weather patterns they've observed over the years, they have earned the title of seasoned professionals. Even so, I think it's safe to say that, at least once, we have all been caught in an unexpected downpour or complained way too much when it was colder outside than we thought. We always think we know what is going to happen because of things that have happened in the past. We make a plan or a prediction based on what we know, but, as we read, that plan didn't quite work out for Paul.

His ship was on a certain path. He had a plan for what he was going to do and he thought that was best for him. But God didn't think so. He sends a hurricane, a massive storm Paul's way. Paul didn't plan for this; he couldn't have planned for this because God had different ideas. Paul spent time formulating his plan and he prepared only for his plan, but he was caught off guard when God's plans for Paul were different than his own. I'm sure that's a familiar feeling: God's divine plans were different than his own earthly plans.

If nothing else, Paul proves that we can't predict the forecast. There might be 10% chance of rain one day and an 80% chance the next but we can rely on God 100% of the time to do what is best for us even when we may not see it. We hear in Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[a] have been called according to his purpose," and I know you have heard this verse before but listen to these words carefully again: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future," says Jeremiah 29:11.

Here is the good news: God wants us to weather the storm and He delights in our success. He doesn't send heavy rains or pounding wind just to beat us down, even though that's what it feels like sometimes. On our worst days, when we struggle financially, when we fight with family or friends, when we feel as though we are facing this world alone, when nothing seems to be going right or we just can't catch a break, God is with us in all of it. He is in the eye of the storm when all is well and He is beside us when we are tossed around in a hurricane, soaking wet and terrified. We just need to open our eyes to see Him instead of clenching our eyes out of fear because goodness knows there's more than enough of that in this world.

One of my favorite contemporary Christian songs, “How He Loves” by the David Crowder Band, describes our relationship with God in such a beautiful way: He “loves like a hurricane; I am a tree, bending beneath the weight of His wind and mercy”. God loves like a hurricane; I am a tree, bending beneath the weight of His wind and mercy.

Friends, I pray that the Lord shines His face upon you and that he showers you in comfort and joy and the peace that only He can provide. I hope you bask in the warmth of the rays of the sun and play in His clear, calm waters. But I also hope that you feel all of the wind and the beautiful chaos and the radical love of the Lord. I pray that you are the tree. Not one that tries to resist the sometimes overwhelming force of our mighty God, but one that submits itself to the storm, trusting that God will provide when all we know we have is such an unpredictable forecast and the abounding, immeasurable love of our Lord.

Amen.