

**Ezekiel 18: 1-4, 25-32**

Every year when the hurricanes come there are always residents who refuse to leave their homes. They ignore the warnings. They defy the orders. They stay put. And every year some of them die. When Ike blew through Galveston, Texas this month, rescue workers had to spend tax-payer's dollars as well as many hours helping those people who had refused to leave. Even though none of them were killed this time, they put the rescue workers in jeopardy and they hindered the efforts of the local authorities in keeping the area secure. What they did was wrong.

Through His prophet, Ezekiel, God warns us; yes He commands us not to defy Him, but to turn and leave when the hurricanes of iniquity threaten to overtake us. Hurricane season on our coasts only runs another month or so, but for us who live in this sinful world, we can never let down our guard. The winds of temptation do not ever let up, and the storms of sin always seek to drown us in the depths of hell. "Repent declares the Lord God and turn from all your transgressions lest iniquity be your ruin...I have no pleasure in the death of anyone says the Lord, so turn and live."

What is it with us Christians? Apparently we think that we are immune to the attacks of the devil; that the hurricanes of iniquity cannot harm us; that they will not overtake us because we are members of Christ Lutheran Congregation. And so we live on the edge of the storm. We tempt God. We scarcely open His Word to read and study it. We stay away when the pastor, His called messenger, leads us into its pages. We are apathetic toward the Third Commandment. We come to church only when it's convenient for us to do so. We turn up our nose at the flesh and blood of our Savior, acting as if receiving His Sacrament is a matter of choice. And when God warns us to leave behind this sinful way of thinking and living, we refuse; we defy Him and stay put right where we're at. "No one is going to tell me how often I need to go to church." "No one is going to convince me that I need the Lord's Supper more often than I take it." "No one is going to change my living habits and convince me that I should go to Bible Class and read my Bible more." "No one...not even God."

But with that attitude we are not prepared for the coming storms. When this year's hurricanes hit, even those residents who had nice homes, nice cars, beautiful yards, impressive yachts—saw everything twisted into a heap of junk. Hurricanes don't care how long you have lived in the area. They don't care how wealthy or how poor you are. They ruin the lives of everyone in their path. If you don't get out of the way, they will destroy you no matter who you are.

And so it is with sin. But for some reason we have the attitude that because we are forgiven by Jesus, we can play around with temptation. We think that because we are God's baptized children, we can disregard His commandments. But with that attitude, we will perish when the hurricane comes. Listen to God's prophet: "When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it...the soul that sins shall die." Jesus did not give His life for you so that you can ignore His preaching and His Sacrament. He did not baptize you and wash you of your sins so that you can stay put in your sinfulness and refuse to leave. When the Israelites walked through the parted waters of the Red Sea, they came out ready to live a life free from Pharaoh's control. But had they defied God and Moses and stayed put at the bottom of that sea bed refusing to follow the

Lord's servant out of the waters, those waters would have come crashing down upon them and they would have drowned in the depths with the Egyptians.

“Repent!” God says to you and me...Come out from your sins...Get away from the coming hurricane...Leave your wicked ways behind; seek righteousness and live! For God does not want anyone to perish. It's always sad when we hear of a resident who perishes in a hurricane. Even though they ignored the warnings and refused to leave, we don't say with smugness, “They got what they deserved.” We are always saddened by such a death. And so with God. He commands us to leave our sinful ways behind not because He enjoys bossing us around, but because He does not desire our ruin. It gives Him no pleasure to watch an unrepentant person fall into the depths of hell. He wants all to be saved. Jesus died for all, and He wants all to hear and believe the good news and to live not in stubborn sin, but in our new life in Christ. When the hurricanes come, He warns us in His Word to get away and leave; leave our sinful ways because He wants no one to perish.

Now if this was the end of the story, then it would be a sad story indeed. For not one of us here has the ability within ourselves to do what God commands. According to our nature, you and I would defy Him at every turn. We would camp out right in the middle of the storm's path. We would live in sin and ignore God's Word and Sacraments. The Law tells us what to do, but it does not allow us to do it. If you and I are to flee the hurricanes of iniquity; if you and I are to turn away from our wickedness and leave our sinful ways behind, then it will happen by God's grace alone who is for you in Christ Jesus, and through Christ is at work in you by the power of His Word.

Hear now that living Word...”The soul that sins shall die,” says the Lord God. And that Soul, friend, already died for you. Are you a sinner? According to the Law, yes; but not according to the good news of Christ. Jesus, the sinless One, became sin for you, and you now are forgiven. Have you defied God? According to the Law, yes; but not according to the good news of Christ. Jesus, the Holy One, became the One who defied God in your place. He became the adulterer that you and I are. Jesus became the gossip and the stubborn person, and the liar, and the selfish person in your place and mine. “The soul that sins shall die.” This is God's truth. But just as true is this good news: The Soul who died was Jesus, and He did this for you. Christ died once for every sinner. He perished in hell for you. He died so that you now live in Him. Trusting in Jesus, you will not die, but you will live.

“I have no pleasure,” says God, “in the death of anyone.” But in reality He took pleasure in one death. God was pleased to send His Son to die for you. God was pleased that His Son went to the cross in your place. He was pleased to pour out His righteous wrath upon Jesus so that He now pours out for you the cup of salvation in His Supper. God was pleased to leave His Son stranded by Himself in the fierce path of the hurricane of hell, and watch as your Savior suffered in agony for you.

No hurricane was ever as powerful; ever as deadly as the storm of judgment Jesus endured for you. And with His words, “It is finished!” He declared for all to hear that hurricane season is now over. There is no sin yet to be punished. There is no anger left in the heart of God. Your God is at peace with you. He knows nothing but love toward you; nothing but mercy and compassion.

So how shall we live? Shall we tempt God? Shall we continue in sin and ignore His words of life? Let's come out of that Red Sea bottom and live in the freedom we have been given in Christ. Let's move to higher ground when the winds of temptation come swirling and the storms of sin come threatening. In Christ you are safe. In Him hurricane season is over. Your sins cannot bring you to ruin. Do not walk away from your Savior back to the edge of the storm. He is your Rescuer. He gave His life so that you may live. Now, dear Christian, let's live as the people we are—His forgiven children in Christ. Amen.