

We are gathered here today in the hope of the resurrection of the dead through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And even having this hope, because we are but frail human beings, it is tempting to ask, “Where was God on December 10th? Could He not have prevented the tornado? Could He not have intervened to prevent the loss of life and home? Ollie’s life, her home and your home, Vernon.”

We know He could have. But He did not. Yet He does not leave our questions unanswered. The banner to my right is where His answer begins. “Ollie,” it says, “I have called you by name, you are Mine.” These words are from Isaiah 43, and I want to read them in their context:

“But now thus says the Lord, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

Where was God on that dreadful night? Here in these words is His answer. He was there with you in the very midst of the storm. He was there in the tornado, Vernon, to spare your life. And He was there in the storm to take His dear Ollie to heaven.

You remember how Elijah was taken up to heaven, on chariots and horses of fire. He went up on these, we’re told, in a whirlwind. And so with Ollie, through the devastation caused by the whirlwind on December 10, God, in the very midst of it, took her to heaven.

And Ollie’s home and your home, He took that, too. And yet, in a few minutes we will sing, “Heaven is my home.” Ollie is there now with Jesus. And her home is also your home, Vernon. You shared a home together here for many decades. But the home you will have together in heaven is forever. It will never be destroyed, not ever.

And it’s because your Lord says to you, “*I have called you by name, you are Mine.*” He called Ollie by name in her baptism. Even though she was with you, her family, for eighty-four years, she always belonged to the Lord. And yet He gave her to you to be with you for a while, to know and to love, and be loved by her. But then it was time. Time for her to be fully with her Lord. To be at peace. To have unending joy. To be secure in His arms where no storm can ever come.

We were reminded on December 10 that we will pass through the storms in life. God, in His wisdom, does not keep the storms away from us. “*When you pass through the waters,*” it says in Isaiah 43. Not “If you pass through them,” and not “If you walk through fire,” but “*When you walk through fire.*” Tornados come. Storms come. Sicknesses come. We walk through many painful ordeals in life. Homes are destroyed. Lives are taken. But in all these your Lord is with you because you belong to Him. Your baptism into Christ Jesus assures you of this.

Where was God? He never left you. He never left Ollie. “*Because you are precious in My eyes...and I love you.*” These are God’s words to you, also in Isaiah 43.

Where was God? He was in all those dear people, and there were, and still are many of them, who helped you after the tornado, who loved you and gave their support in many ways. God was loving you and caring for you through all of them.

Where was God? Because of His love for you, for each and everyone of you, we look to the cross of Golgotha. There is your God. He suffers the storm of God's wrath to prevent that wrath from coming to you. Jesus did not deserve that fiery storm on the cross. We do, for we are the sinners, not Him. But you are precious to God, and He loves you. And so, you have a Savior, Jesus Christ. He suffered, and He died, and He rose again for all of you. And all of you are forgiven. There is no one here whose sins are not forgiven. God declares each and everyone of you forgiven of all your sins.

And you, because God also called you by name in your baptism, belong to Him. And so, believe with all your heart, the truth that heaven is also your home. Because it is through your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.