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Nicole Partin Abdnour Date

Holy Space:
Worship and Proclamation in the Liminal Space of Post-Disaster and Pre-Recovery

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Abstract

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When catastrophic hurricanes make landfall, indiscriminately destroying whatever is in its path, whole communities are impacted. Within these communities, now indelibly marked by trauma from natural disaster, are churches who gather every Sabbath for worship. These churches are led by pastors marked by trauma from the hurricane just as the members who will gather. This paper explores the question of how in the immediate aftermath of trauma from communal acute natural disasters the function of the sermon is impacted within the larger liturgical setting of worship, and what tools preachers can utilize amid such trauma to allow for the community to grieve that they may experience God's grace through worship and heal over time.

Holy Space:
Worship and Proclamation in the Liminal Space of Post-Disaster and Pre-Recovery

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When the storm has passed
and the roads are tamed
and we are the survivors
of a collective shipwreck.
~Alexis Valdes

Introduction

Charley, Katrina, Harvey, Irma, Michael, and Ida: the catastrophic hurricanes that made landfall in the United States over the past two decades is far more expansive than this list. These named storms are a small representation of so many others that have wrought catastrophic destruction on entire communities. Each of these storms destroyed homes and businesses, as well as entire community infrastructures as wind and water destroyed life and property.[1] Within each of these communities now indelibly marked by trauma from natural disaster are churches which gather every Sabbath for worship. These churches are led by pastors marked by trauma from the hurricane as are the members who gather. Acknowledging the complexity of this context, this paper explores the question of how the function of the sermon in the larger liturgical setting shifts in the immediate aftermath of the event in response to acute communal natural disasters.

Trauma takes different forms and is precipitated by a variety of events.[2] The focus of this project is on acute trauma from natural disasters because whole communities are affected when

1. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Hurricane Katrina alone caused more than $160 billion in damage and resulted in over 1,800 deaths in Louisiana and Mississippi. Encyclopedia Britannica. "Hurricane Katrina | Deaths, Damage, & Facts." Accessed September 30, 2021. https://www.britannica.com/event/Hurricane-Katrina.

2. Carolyn Yoder offers a summary list of experiences that can be the source of trauma. The experiences range from but are not limited to structural violence, pandemics and epidemics, abuse or assault, human-caused disasters such as chemical-spills, mass-violence, and natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, and tsunamis. Yoder, Carolyn. *The Little Book of Trauma Healing: When Violence Strikes and Community Security Is Threatened*. (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005), 13-14.

natural disaster strikes. Acute trauma is understood here as trauma occurring because of a one-time, singular event. This project focuses on trauma precipitated by humans' experience of hurricanes.

My first call to ministry began in May 2004 as an Associate Pastor at St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, Louisiana. Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans fifteen months later on August 29, 2005 (the first anniversary of my ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament). When the levees broke two days later as a result of neglect and structural insufficiencies, it amplified the destruction to communities in New Orleans. Though the physical structure of the church and the physical structure of my own home fared comparatively well, the entire community was marked and affected by the trauma of the storm and its residual effects. The smells of mold and death lingered for months as people returned in waves to salvage what they could and place on the curb what was lost. People were displaced for months and even years, even those few who had the financial means to repair or rebuild, due to supply and labor shortages. The grief of loss pulsated through the entire community as people lost homes, jobs, and the precious lives of loved ones.

While the entire community experienced trauma from the hurricane, particular segments of the community suffered disproportionately from the impact of the storm and the subsequent flooding. Hurricane Katrina brought to light the reality of those already living with structurally induced traumas from poverty, racism, and on-going violence. Not all trauma is acute and brought about by a singular and rare event; some trauma is chronic and on-going. The images and stories that came out of the Lower Ninth Ward reveal the overlapping nature of trauma. Natural disasters do not discriminate in bringing destruction; they only compound injustices and pre-existing trauma, as was revealed in New Orleans.

Currently, I serve Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church, a congregation located in Tampa, Fl. The church is located in South Tampa, a four-by-eight-mile peninsula situated approximately twenty miles from the Gulf of Mexico, with Old Tampa Bay bordering its west side and Hillsborough Bay its east side. No major hurricane has struck the Tampa Bay region in one hundred years; however, the region is susceptible to hurricanes and vulnerable, with hundreds of thousands of residents living in flood zones.[3] The risk for this community to experience acute trauma from a hurricane is consequently high.

Though the focus of this paper and the liturgical tools in the Appendix center upon communal trauma brought on by hurricanes, my hope is that this conversation around trauma, worship, and preaching will be a resource to clergy serving congregations affected more broadly by natural disasters and similar communal traumas. The paper begins with a basic overview of trauma and trauma's impact on individuals and communities. It then turns to examine briefly the role of worship within a congregation and more specifically the function a sermon serves within the larger liturgical setting of worship. After considering both trauma theory and worship practices, the paper argues that using preaching as a mode of pastoral care in congregations whose communities have experienced acute trauma from natural disasters holds the necessary space for the community to grieve, heal, and experience God's grace.

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3. Sometimes referred to as the 1921 Hurricane and at other times the Tarpon Springs Hurricane, this Category 4 Hurricane made landfall on Oct. 25, 1921with a storm surge that peaked at eleven feet. "Eight people died and millions of dollars in damage was reported as the region's citrus crop was lost and homes were destroyed" according to a Tampa Bay Times article written on the one hundred year anniversary of the storms landfall. Tampa Publishing Company. "100 Years Later, Tarpon Springs Hurricane Reminds Tampa Bay It Can Happen Here." Tampa Bay Times. Accessed October 31, 2021. https://www.tampabay.com/hurricane/2021/10/17/100-years-later-tarpon-springs-hurricane-reminds-tampa-bay-it-can-happen-here/.

Trauma Basics

Carolyn Yoder, a licensed clinical therapist who specializes in trauma healing, defines traumatic events as those events which "involve threats to life or our bodies; produce terror and feelings of helplessness; overwhelm an individual or group's ability to cope or respond to the threat; lead to a sense of loss of control; challenge a person's or group's sense that life is meaningful and orderly."[4] Hurricane Katrina was a traumatic event, as all hurricanes have the potential to be. In addition to the traumatic event itself, there is also the subsequent experience of trauma. Kai Erikson, a sociologist who has worked and written extensively on the social impact of catastrophic events, offers a definition of the experience of trauma: "Trauma is generally taken to mean a blow to the tissues of the body – or more frequently now, to the tissues of the mind – that results in injury or some other disturbance."[5] Even this short definition of trauma alludes to the evolution of the understanding of trauma. How we experience a violently disruptive event and its residual, long-term effects are different from but no less significant than the traumatic event itself.

The term *trauma* refers initially to the basic and foundational understanding that a wound or injury has been violently inflicted upon the body and expands to include how trauma impacts our "interior selves."[6] The experience of traumatic events is not limited to physical experience; rather the impact of the traumatic event affects one's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual

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4. Yoder, *Trauma Healing,* 7.

5. Cathy Caruth, ed. *Trauma:Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 183.

6. Serene Jones offers an excellent and brief look at the evolution of the definition of trauma in Chapter 1. Serene Jones, *Trauma + Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, Second, (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 12-15.

wellbeing. The term trauma, as used throughout this paper, is the effect of a traumatic event. Bessel Van Der Kolk, a clinical psychologist, writing extensively about the multi-faceted nature of trauma, says that "trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on the mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present."[7] Building on the work of Bessel van der Kolk and Judith Herman, two pioneers in the area of trauma studies, theologian and trauma theorist Serene Jones offers a helpful definition which acknowledges the impact of a traumatic event on the whole self, "A traumatic event is one in which a person or persons perceives themselves or others as threatened by an external force that seeks to annihilate them and against which they are unable to resist and which overwhelms their capacity to cope."[8]

Trauma affects the entirety of one's being and has physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual repercussions that can manifest themselves over an extended period resulting in what Van der Kolk calls a "fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think."[9] Yoder goes on to explain that the effects of trauma, "shatters meaning; leaves us disordered, disempowered and feeling disconnected," and that our responses to trauma include "anger, anxiety, depression, and asking questions (personal and global)."[10] Together, Van der Kolk and Yoder highlight that trauma has both a biological response and an existential impact on

7. Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, (New York: Viking, 2014), 21.

8. Jones, *Theology + Grace*, 13.

9. Van der Kolk, *Body Keeps the Score*, 21.

10. Ibid., 24.

a person. Immediate response to a traumatic event is biological and automatically generates from within a person's nervous system. Yoder builds upon neuroscientist Stephen Porges's Polyvagal Theory to describe the nervous system's automatic response to safety or threat/fear: "(1) the social engagement system (face-heart); (2) mobilization (fight/flight); and (3) immobilization (freeze/collapse)."[11] Using the image of a ladder Yoder urges us to

> Think of these three responses as three levels of a ladder, where without conscious thought, we move up or down all day long according to the biological response to how safe or threatened we feel in our bodies, our environments, and our relationships. The closer to the top, the greater our feeling of safety and the greater the degree of integrated brain functioning allowing us to respond to what is happening in multiple ways. The more we feel threat/fear, the lower we go on the ladder, and the more instinct-driven our behavior becomes as higher brain function goes increasingly "off-line."[12]

In the immediate aftermath of a catastrophic hurricane, most individuals will be moving between rungs two and three, with their nervous systems firing off fight/flight or freezing/collapse responses. Where one is located on the ladder when the natural disaster occurs accounts for the variety of traumatic responses and impacts seen within a community to the very same traumatic event.

While the experience of trauma and how it manifests itself in individuals varies, one of the common experiences of trauma survivors is a loss of and the inadequacy of language.[13] Kai Erikson in his work with the Buffalo Creek community following catastrophic flooding observed, "words people are accustomed to using in everyday speech seem pale and insubstantial

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11. Yoder, *Trauma Healing*, 18.

12. Ibid., 18.

13. The biblical witness of Job testifies to the phenomenon of loss of language abilities in the aftermath of traumatic experience. Job sat mute for seven days, and his friends joined him having seen the enormity of his suffering (2:13).

when assigned the job of conveying so immense a subject."[14] Joni Sancken, a pastor and professor of homiletics, reflecting upon the reality that trauma is an instance in which words often fail us, notes some of the common experiences of trauma: "People who have experienced trauma often share a set of assumptions caused by their experience of powerlessness, imminent death, and the ineffectiveness of language. Survivors struggle to feel safe, trust others, and find meaning in life."[15] The implications for a congregation in this are at least two-fold. First, there may be the inability to recall words used regularly in worship. For example, people may stumble while praying The Lord's Prayer or reciting The Apostles' Creed, which typically would be second nature and spoken without conscious effort. Second, the meaning of words used in worship through prayer, song, and scripture may shift from being accepted as true and experienced as affirming or comforting to being questioned, doubted, meaningless, and even rejected in the experience of the traumatic event. These implications are also true for the preacher who may experience a lack of confidence in preaching as the task of sermon writing requires more effort due to the disconnect in meaning-making and the experience of language loss.

The time immediately following a traumatic event is liminal space. There is a "before" and "after" for survivors of trauma, or as Dr. Kimberly Wagner articulates, there is a communal experience of an "in-between space between the 'now already' and 'not yet'" which immediately follows the trauma event.[16] Though she is writing specifically about the trauma experienced from

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14. Kai Erikson, *Everything In Its Path* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 8.

15. Joni Sancken, "When Our Words Fail Us: Preaching Gospel to Trauma Survivors," in *Theologies of the Gospel in Context: The Crux of Homiletical Theology*, ed. David Schnasa Jacobsen (Eugene, Ore: Cascade Books, 2017), 113-14.

16. Kimberly Renee Wagner, "From the Depths : Preaching in the Wake of Mass Violent Trauma" (Ann Arbor, Emory University, 2018), 151.

mass violence, the implications are relevant for trauma experienced as a result of other forms of traumatic events such as natural disasters. Wagner writes:

> In the hours, days, or weeks following an act of mass violence…communities stand in an in-between space—between the atrocity and rebuilding; between disbelief and understanding; between the evil that has happened and the healing yet to come….The post-traumatic time is a liminal space where confusion, pain, mourning, anger, and even tastes of hope meet.[17]

What one knew to be true about oneself, one's community, the world, and God before the trauma is no longer trusted and often questioned after the trauma. Wagner calls this "narrative fracture" and highlights that when narrative fracture occurs the tools and resources relied on before the trauma, like significant relationships with others and with God, no longer provide the grounding they once did as the survivor wrestles with and at times becomes immobilized by large existential questions, questions like: *Why did this happen? What does it mean that I survived? Where was God? How did God allow this to happen?*[18]

Before turning to communal trauma, it is important to note that pastors and preachers do well to be trauma-aware, for the church gathering for worship is always an assembly of traumatized persons. Individuals entering worship carry with them individual losses and trauma experiences; and while an individual's trauma may not be known to the pastor, statistically there will always be someone in the congregation who has experienced and is trying to cope with trauma – the single parent who has lost their job, the widow or widower living alone for the first time in sixty years, the child living with an alcoholic and emotionally abusive parent, the teen who was raped, or the adult realizing they were a victim of sexual abuse decades prior. The

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17. Wagner, *From the Depths*, 151-152.

18. Ibid., 197.

preacher must be cognizant and full of care that in our broken world these individuals make up our congregations every day.

Communal Trauma

Trauma is always experienced on the personal, individual level; however, trauma can also be experienced on a communal level. Erikson has spent a tremendous amount of his work and research with communities that have faced communal trauma of one form or another[19] and through that work concludes that "traumatized communities are something distinct from assemblies of traumatized individuals."[20] According to Erikson, "Sometimes the tissues of community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues of mind and body...traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create mood, an ethos – a group culture, almost – that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up. Trauma has a social dimension."[21] It is helpful for pastors and preachers to be aware that trauma affects community just as powerfully as it affects the individual(s) within the community. Since this project looks at how worship can promote healing within traumatized communities, it is important to describe some of the effects trauma has on communities. When a traumatic event affects many persons, like a natural disaster, the effects of trauma impact individual persons and the fabric of the community. As Yoder proposes, "Whether direct or indirect, a group experience

19. Erikson's work has included but is not limited to the impact of flooding as a result of dam failure in Buffalo Creek, West Virginia; a nuclear meltdown in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania; and a waterway contamination of Ojibway Indian Reserve in Ontario.

20. Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 185.

21. Caruth, *Trauma*, 185.

of trauma can set off widespread fear, horror, helplessness, or anger. Such events are not merely private experiences but have impact at national and regional levels, resulting in societal trauma."[22]

Common reactions to communal trauma include shock, a sense of chaos, survivor guilt, and preoccupation with images of death and destruction.[23] "The experience of trauma at its worst," says Erikson, "can mean not only a loss of confidence in the self, but a loss of confidence in the surrounding tissue of family and community, in the structures of human government, in the larger logics by which humankind lives, in the ways of nature itself, and often (if this is really the final step in such a succession) in God."[24]Another aspect of communal trauma is the bringing together of people who have the shared experience of surviving a catastrophic event which can illicit feelings of goodwill and togetherness. There can be an overwhelming desire to do good that draws people together as an act of celebration for having survived. Erikson notes this shift of what holds community together, writing, "The mortar bonding human communities together is made up, at least in part, of trust and respect and decency – and, in moments of crisis, of charity and concern."[25] An apt question at this juncture is: What makes some communities and not others move towards charity and concern in times of communal trauma?

Another way to frame the question is to consider what makes some communities resilient. Jack Saul, writing for mental health professionals about large scale trauma, defines community resilience as, a "community's capacity, hope and faith to withstand major trauma and loss,

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22. Yoder, *Trauma Healing*, 13.

23. Ibid., 28.

24. Caruth, *Trauma*, 198.

25. Ibid., 193.

overcome adversity, and to prevail, usually with increased resources, competence, and connectedness."[26] Saul makes the case that a community's resilience is found within the connectedness of the community itself.

Within communities of faith, worship is a communal act which connects individuals to God, individuals to one another, the worshipping community to God, and the worshipping community to the broader community in which it is located. This paper investigates whether worship has the potential to bring individuals who are feeling isolated and estranged because of communal trauma back into the bonds of a nurturing community, which can allow for healing of the individual and community. Theologian and therapist Jennifer Baldwin discusses practices of resiliency after trauma and states, "In order for recovery and resiliency to be complete, holistic care requires inclusion of care of the body, restoration of connections in community, and reclamation of relationship with the divine in whatever form resonates with the individual."[27] Baldwin speculates that congregational leaders may be even "better equipped than mental health care providers to foster connections and attachments among survivors, community, and the divine."[28] To explore this concept further, we now turn our attention to the purpose and role of worship within the Christian community.

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26. Jack Saul, *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing: Promoting Community Resilience in the Aftermath of Disaster* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 8.

27. Jennifer Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 55.

28. Ibid., 55.

What is Worship?

Worship, for Christians, is "the primary witness to the faith, hope, and love we have in Jesus Christ."[29] As articulated in the Directory for Worship of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Christian worship "gives all glory and honor, praise and thanksgiving to the holy, triune God. We are gathered in worship to glorify the God who is present and active among us – particularly through the gifts of Word and Sacrament. We are sent out in service to glorify the same God who is present and active in the world."[30] Worship of the triune God is at the center of a congregation's life. Worship grounds the community of believers in God's redemptive love through Jesus Christ, reminds both individuals and community of their identity rooted in God's character, and sends them back out into the world to love and serve God.

Worship is ordered. There is a pattern to the ritual of worship, and though the pattern may vary depending on which denominational branch of the Christian tradition is gathered, the pattern and flow to worship in the Protestant tradition centers on glorifying God and bearing witness to Jesus Christ. The community of the church glorifies God and bears witness to Jesus Christ in worship as it sings, prays, hears Scripture read and proclaimed, and celebrates the sacraments together. William Willimon describes a basic pattern for worship with the acknowledgement of the varying ways a congregation can carry out the content of the pattern depending on the liturgical year emphasis, the Scripture of the day, or congregational context. The worship pattern Willimon recommends contains both The Service of the Word and The

29. Presbyterian Church, *Book of Order 2019-2021: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II*, (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2019), 76.

30. Presbyterian Church, *Book of Order,* 76.

Service of the Table.[31] The Service of the Word consists of 1) Gathering – as people come together there may be announcements, greetings, music, opening prayer, and processions; 2) Proclamation and Praise – Scriptures are read and proclaimed through preaching; anthems and hymns that proclaim God's Word may be included as well; 3) Response and Offerings – people respond to God's Word through the giving of their prayers and gifts in service to the world and one another, and if the Service of the Table does not follow, then the people are sent out into the world with a charge and blessing.[32] The Service of the Table, which is preceded by the Service of the Word in Sabbath worship, "enacts the Word according to our Lord's command," taking the bread and the cup; giving thanks for the bread and cup through The Great Thanksgiving, "a historic prayer, which lifts up the full sweep of salvation history culminating in the ritual of the upper room;" breaking the bread as Jesus did; and sharing the bread and cup with one another as Jesus did with the disciples.[33] Protestant worship is rooted in and ordered around these scripturally grounded elements, even within traditions with liturgical freedom, providing a familiar tool to employ and lean into when a traumatic event affects a community.

The broadest context of Christian worship is hope in God who is and was and is to come. This theological foundation is practiced by congregations every time they gather on the Sabbath. Though it may not be specifically articulated, "All Christian worship leans into God's coming

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31. Willimon argues for the worship service to include both the full Word and Table pattern each sabbath day worship while acknowledging many mainline Protestant congregations do not include the liturgy of the Table with such frequency. As a pastor in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the denomination in which I serve is one in which the frequency of the liturgy of the Table varies greatly and is determined by each congregation. William H. Willimon, A Guide to Preaching and Leading Worship (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 16-23.

32. Willimon, *A Guide to Preaching*, 16-17.

33. Ibid., 17.

reign, inviting trust in the One who will make all things new," writes professor of preaching and worship Ron Byars, acknowledging that God has not yet completed God's work with the world.[34] Protestant Christian worship varies contextually community by community and congregation by congregation. A community is perhaps most acutely aware in times of disaster and crisis that the fullness of God's kingdom has not yet been brought to completion. In the aftermath of a traumatic event, the church can lean into its worship practices to cultivate resiliency.

Function and Form of the Sermon

The Word of God is central to worship in the Reformed Church, and as such the reading and proclamation of the Word is at the center of the worship service. Since the reading and preaching of the Word bear witness to God's self-revelation to those assembled, the sermon must be based in and derive from the serious and prayerful study and reflection of the primary scripture text for the day with consideration for the community among whom the sermon will be preached. To tend to the text and the context, Rice and Huffstutler suggest, "the pastor stands with one foot (so to speak) in the biblical text and the other in the modern world in which people are struggling to live faithfully. Every sermon must speak directly to them and seek to shed light upon their lives, make faith more real for them, and provide guidance."[35] To the point but stating it differently, Jacobsen advocates that preaching be "a thoroughgoing theological activity that

34. Ronald P. Byars, *Christian Worship: Glorifying and Enjoying God*, Foundations of Christian Faith (Louisville, Ky.: Geneva Press, 2000), 12.

35. Howard L. Rice and James C. Huffstutler, *Reformed Worship* (Louisville, Ky.: Geneva Press, 2001), 89.

requires naming gospel while honoring the otherness of texts, the uniqueness of situations, and the particularities of context."[36]

A worship service bears witness to God's salvific work through Jesus Christ, and within the broader liturgical context of worship the sermon functions to bear witness to God's work to a particular people living in a particular time and place. The sermon in naming what God has done in the past and naming the current realities of present day (both in gratitude and lament) can point people towards a future that through faith is full of hope. Due to the importance of context informing the content of a sermon and the connectedness of the community being foundational to a community's resiliency, when a community experiences the traumatic event of a natural disaster the sermon must function both as a response to the natural disaster and to God's character and promises amid the community's experience of the trauma. Such attention can provide nurture, support, and encouragement for people living and grappling with shattered meaning, one of trauma's effects.

Working in tandem with the function of the sermon within the liturgical setting of worship is the form of the sermon. Alyce McKenzie in a chapter entitled "Form Follows Function," highlights the influential work of Tom Long in his book *The Witness of Preaching*. McKenzie, quoting Long, points to the crucial role of sermon form, "Despite the fact that it passes by relatively unnoticed, form is absolutely vital to the meaning and effect of a sermon…sermon form translates the potential energy of the sermon productive movement, while remaining itself quietly out of view."[37] For many years in the North American Protestant church

36. Jacobsen, *Theologies of the Gospel*, 1.

37. Alyce M. McKenzie, "Form Follows Function" in *Questions Preachers Ask: Essays in Honor of Thomas G. Long*, eds. Scott Black Johnston, Ted A. Smith, and Leonora Tubbs

the favored form used by preachers was the deductive, three-point sermon. Within the deductive form, the preacher makes a clear statement at the beginning of the sermon as to the objective of the sermon, which is then fleshed out over the course of the sermon through three points of explanation. McKenzie marks the shift away from this form of preaching in 1971 with the release of Fred Craddock's *As One without Authority*.[38] With this shift the preacher leads listeners in a process of discovery with the clearest statement of objective occurring at the end of the sermon. McKenzie and Long suggest that form follows function, meaning that the preacher's objective of purpose for a sermon ought to be what drives the decision as to what form the sermon takes. A preacher crafting a sermon for a congregation experiencing trauma from a natural disaster will be attentive to the objective of connection to a community experiencing fractured meaning in order to reflect and draw upon the community's resilience in both the function and form of the sermon. Intentional care and attention by the preacher are important, for Kimberly Wagner rightly asserts, "Form is essential to the work of the sermon. The form is not simply the vehicle through which sermon content is carried. The sermonic form is itself an expression of theological content."[39] *How* a sermon is communicated and delivered carries theological implications of similar significance as *what* a sermon says – both of which have the ability to work for or against the preacher's primary objective with the sermon.

Having completed a basic overview of trauma and trauma's impact on individuals and communities primarily through the work of Yoder, Caruth, Erikson, and Wagner we turned briefly to worship and preaching. Our focus was on a mainline Protestant understanding of the

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Tisdale, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 15. See also Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 136.

38. Ibid., 14.
39. Wagner, *From the Depths*, 166.

role of worship within a congregation, and the function a sermon serves within the larger liturgical setting of worship within that context. We now turn our attention to how preaching, as a mode of pastoral care, in congregations whose communities have experienced acute trauma from natural disasters can hold the necessary space in worship for the community to grieve, heal, and experience God's grace.

Worship and Preaching amid Communal Trauma

Trauma can disrupt, threaten, and even destroy an individual's physical safety, their trust in themselves and others, and the meaning they derive from life. As discussed earlier, the disruption, threat, and destruction to safety, trust, and meaning is found not only in the individuals who constitute a community, but within the fabric of the community experiencing acute trauma from natural disasters. I turn now to focus on the ways in which worship is a particular gift to the assembled community, opening a pathway and providing the opportunity, by worship's very nature, for the community to begin a process of feeling safe, building trust, and processing meaning.

The flow and cadence of worship, because it is ordered, will be familiar to participants who are regularly connected to and participating in the worshipping life of their local congregation. By embracing the congregation's standard pattern of worship in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster the pastor offers those gathered much needed spiritual comfort food. Worship is spiritual comfort food, "providing a patterned, purposeful, predictable way of behaving in the midst of crisis, by symbolically focusing our attention upon norms, beliefs, and sentiments regarding our ultimate concerns, religious ritual gives us a way through crises that

might otherwise overwhelm us."[40] Amid a situation in which re-gaining equilibrium, focus, and purpose is difficult, worship can be a healing and a stabilizing force that creates a feeling of safety for individuals feeling isolated and estranged by the experiences of individual and communal trauma.

One of the few voices currently actively researching and writing in the areas of trauma-informed and trauma-responsive preaching in relationship to collective trauma is Dr. Kimberly Wagner, Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Her work has primarily focused on collective trauma as a result of mass violence and global pandemic, and though her research has not focused specifically on communal trauma as a result of natural disaster the reflections and conclusions speak a helpful and informative word to pastors ministering to a community directly affected by natural disaster in the immediate aftermath. In the aftermath of trauma, Dr. Wagner prompts pastors leading worship

> to lead worship in such a way that welcomes the fragments of people's experience without trying to immediately put those fragments back together into a smooth, meaning-making narrative. We might preach in a way – in sermon content *and* sermon form – that honors, models, and opens up opportunities for people's fragments of incomprehensible and presently meaningless experience to be recognized and blessed as not beyond the love and hope of God.[41]

Though the word 'grief' isn't explicitly stated, I would argue that when we welcome people and their fragments we are doing the work of pastoral care by creating space for the grief they carry because of the trauma to be voiced and processed. Grief is the response to loss, often marked by

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40. William H. Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care* (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 1982): 100.

41. Kimberly Wagner, "What Do We Preach? Trauma, Lament, and Social Action," *Call to Worship* 52.3 (February 2019): 8.

deep sadness. While the experience of trauma is not solely defined as grief, grief is often part of a person's experience of trauma.

A Time to Mourn and Space to Grieve

Mourning and grieving do not always come easily or naturally, particularly in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster when there is so much destruction to the physical realm. Carolyn Yoder highlights the importance of creating space for communities to give voice to their individual and collective grief in order to move toward healing over time after a traumatic event. To state it another way, people need to mourn and grieve because unexpressed grief prevents healing. Tending to the emotional and spiritual losses can be pushed aside when having to deal with the chaos of loss of electricity, water, and communication lines along with damage to the physical structures of homes and businesses if not their complete loss. Worship and preaching can assist in facilitating a helpful and healthy processing of one's experience of trauma.

As spiritual and community leaders, it will help pastors to remember that the "fear of being overwhelmed; inability to face what happened; threats to the known 'order'; truth that is unknowable; trauma that is ongoing; and inability to carry out usual rituals" are all obstacles to one's ability to grieve or mourn.[42] Worship, in both its content of witness and its ordered structure, can facilitate movement through these obstacles towards a space that not only permits but invites, encourages, and supports grieving and mourning, thus allowing movement towards healing. Grieving and mourning make way for healing because these acts "unfreeze(s) our body, mind, and spirit so we can think creatively, feel fully, and move forward again."[43] Worship

42. Yoder, *Trauma Healing*, 37.

43. Ibid., 35.

creates space for communal connection and makes space for grieving both of which help foster community resilience.

Although sixteen and a half years have passed since Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans where I was living and working at the time, there are several distinctive moments in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane and subsequent levee break that I remember with such whole-bodied clarity it is as if they happened yesterday. One of those memories comes from the latter part of the week after the storm. When the hurricane made landfall on Sunday, August 29, I was safely sheltered at a friend's home in Birmingham, Alabama. When I awoke in Birmingham that Tuesday morning to the news that the levees had broken and the city of New Orleans was flooding, I decided I needed the sanctuary of my family and drove to Southwest Florida to shelter with them. The only distinctive memory I have from the latter part of that week is a phone conversation with a friend and mentor in which they kindly asked me what I needed. With a deep ache and a new overwhelming clarity, I quickly replied, "I need it to be Sunday so I can be in church," surprising us both. Like a good mentor, my friend probed a bit, wondering why it needed to be Sunday; after all I could go to my family's local church at any time to sit and be in the space for prayer and reflection. Nor did I need to be in any specific space to have access to God; God hears our prayers no matter where we are located. Intellectually I knew this, and yet what I needed, what I longed for in the moment was to be in worship. I needed the community of faith to gather so I would be surrounded by people who could give expression to and bear witness to the faith I held but was at a loss to give expression to myself in the moment. Sunday came as Sunday always does, and as the community, led by the pastors and musicians, worshipped God, I exhaled for what felt like the first time in a week. The congregation sang songs of praise, prayed words of confession, petition, and thanksgiving, and listened to the Word

of God through Scripture and proclamation. I breathed and cried. For the first time in a week, an overwhelming sense of peace washed over me; there, surrounded by the community of faith worshipping God and with the soundtrack of their prayers, songs, and proclamation, the space for me to breathe and cry was created. What I learned through this experience, the people of God have known intuitively, if not cognitively, all along.

Biblical Lament: A Resource for Worship that Creates Space for Grief and Fosters Community Resiliency

Scripture models lament, the practice of giving voice to grief. To lament is to "express sorrow, mourning, or regret for," often demonstratively.[44] Throughout scripture, lament is seen in the Psalms, the book of Lamentations, and narratives found in both the Old and New Testaments. The book of Psalms contains individual and communal laments that give voice to a variety of contexts and seasons of life. What we find within those psalms is movement. Psalm 10 is an example of the movement where the author begins from a place of despair and devastation in which God is questioned, "Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?" The psalmist recounts the ways of the wicked, "Their ways prosper at all times; your judgments are on high, out of their sight;" accusing God of allowing the prosperity of the wicked and their preying on the vulnerable. Yet, the psalmist also gives expression to knowing and trusting the character of God to take action, and commands God to do so now, "Rise up, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed." The psalmist bears witness to God's prior activity recounting, "But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief, that you may take it into your hands; the helpless commit themselves to you; you have been the helper of the orphan." The psalm of lament concludes by trusting God's future action, "O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek; you

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44. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, "Definition of LAMENT," accessed January 12, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lament.

will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more." These words praise God and give voice to the psalmist's faith in God. Lament is a vulnerable expression of faith that is raw, honest, and rooted in relationship with God.

Lament is a scriptural resource and practical tool for congregations and its people living in the immediate aftermath of a catastrophic natural disaster. Individuals and communities experiencing trauma can benefit from this faithful expression. As Scott Ellington reflects on lament in the Hebrew scriptures,

> Lament allows us to resume the journey of faith in the midst of profound loss and divine silence. Were we to either forsake our beliefs or deny our experience, it would be impossible to continue the journey. The cry of lament is not an embarrassing lapse of faith on Israel's part, but is a courageous act of risk-taking. Indeed to remain silent, or worse yet, to mouth praises into the silence, is a betrayal of faith, finding sufficiency as it does in a God who is distant and past. Lament is a profound and potent expression of faith.[45]

Just as the cry of lament is not "an embarrassing lapse of faith" for Israel, neither is lament an embarrassing lapse of faith for the people of God today. Rather, lament is a tangible act of faith which trusts and relies on God to hear and respond to the suffering of God's people.

Biblical lament is not a private act, but rather an accessible tool for preaching and worship. The biblical lament is "from within the context of a foundational relationship that binds together the individual with the community of faith and that community with their God."[46] Incorporating these scriptural resources into the liturgy of the worship service provides the gathered people with the language and words to express their questions, doubts, and fears when

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45. Scott A. Ellington, *Risking Truth : Reshaping the World through Prayers of Lament* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2008), 4.

46. Ibid., 7.

they may otherwise be at a loss for words due to the experience of trauma as a result of natural disaster. The word *liturgy* is derived from the Greek *leitourgia* (*leitos* from *laos*: people plus *ergo*: to work); *liturgy* is then the work of the people.[47] When a catastrophic hurricane or other natural disaster strikes a community the preacher, who is a part of the community, arrives wounded, broken, and traumatized as well. As a result, the one responsible (the preacher) for the order, design, and leadership of the worship service may him/herself be at a loss for words, unable to make sense in their own mind let alone actually speak words aloud that will bring hope or consolation to those coming to worship. The gift of biblical lament is a sign of, and bears witness to, the truth that God comes before us, travels alongside us, and goes ahead of us – even amid our suffering and experiences of trauma. Preachers and worship leaders who identify as co-sufferers with the wider community post-disaster model for the community a relationship to and with God that trusts the promises of faith in chaotic times and allows the liturgy, the work of the people, to fully reflect the current reality of the people's context. The presence of lament in scripture is an invitation both to those who read scripture and design worship to use and build upon these words as the community gathers following a disaster. Facilitating the work of the people to gather, to lament, and to journey through the disaster together, is the primary task of the pastor in the aftermath of trauma.[48] Appendix A provides some samples and suggestions for how these scriptural resources can function as Call to Worship, Prayers, and Scripture Readings within a worship service to be about this work.

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47. Carla A. Grosch-Miller with Megan Warner and Hilary Ison, "Enabling the work of the people: Liturgy in the aftermath of trauma," in *Tragedies and Christian Congregations: The Practical Theology of Trauma,* Megan Warner et al., eds., (London: Routledge, 2019), 149.

48. Grosch-Miller, "Enabling the work" in *Tragedies and Christian Congregations,* 149.

Preaching

Holding together what is known about trauma theory and worship practices, I propose preaching be used as a mode of pastoral care in congregations whose communities have experienced acute trauma from natural disasters holding the necessary space for the community to grieve, lament, heal, and experience God's grace. Preaching, bearing witness to God's work to a particular people in a particular time and place, is a holy and awesome responsibility in the best of times. Pastors spend hours each week in prayer, study, discernment, and writing to prepare a sermon. This preparation time is in addition to the extensive education requirement of mainline denominations for ordination into ministry. Imagine preparing a sermon when there is a lack of access to the time or resources to which one is accustomed. Spending ten to twenty hours per week in sermon preparation is a luxury no longer afforded in the aftermath of a natural disaster. Days and nights are filled with meeting the physical needs of survival and safety for self, family, and congregation. What Ellington says about lament is true about preaching in communities impacted by natural disaster and other communal traumas, "Lament is the product of life experiences and not of detached contemplation. It is not concerned with objectivity, but rather with verbalizing pain."[49] In order for the preacher to bear witness to God's work in the world, with authenticity and integrity, to a community reeling from the destruction and chaos brought on by the disaster they must not proclaim a false word of certainty detached from the reality of the present situation. Preaching is the product of the intersection of life experiences and the interpretation of God's Word; preaching is not detached contemplation of God's Word. The intersection of life experiences and God's Word can at times seem incompatible. As Wagner rightly articulates, one must preach, "the *tension* between what is and what is to come. To do so

49. Ellington, *Risking Truth*, 2.

requires preachers to not ignore the promises of God nor the horrid reality of the traumatic experience."[50]

The first step in embracing this tension is for sermons in the immediate aftermath of disaster to name and lament the reality of the traumatic experience. Naming and lamenting the reality of the experiences of trauma through preaching is a primary task of pastoral care following a traumatic event; it is an act which creates a communal bond that pushes against the isolation and disruption of trauma. Naming and lamenting may be all that is done homiletically for the first week or month following the disaster; it is what the community needs to build resilience and move forward with intentionality towards the possibility and promise of healing. The preacher may do this work of naming and lamenting on behalf of the people, which both models and gives permission for them to continue the work outside of the worship context, or the preacher may invite the people to do this work together as a community in the sermonic moment. Having one's experience seen and heard, giving voice to one's suffering and fears is an essential step of grieving in order to move to healing. Depending on the size of the body gathered for worship this may be done collectively as a whole or in smaller groups. Invite people to share about the experience of the traumatic event from their own unique perspective: *where were you; what did you do; how did you feel*? This form of sharing creates a bond within the community and counteracts the isolation often brought on by traumatic events.

In tending to the community through worship and sermon, it will be important for the pastor to identify with and acknowledge their own place in the suffering of the community. We

50. Kimberly Wagner, "From the Depths: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Violent Trauma" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2018), 152-53.

do not help ourselves or the community by pretending our role as a faith leader distances us or exempts us from the impact of the traumatic event. Joni Sancken suggests:

> Preachers cannot pretend to be dispassionate when common shock strikes close to us. When we are aware of our own distress around an event, naming our involvement and connection can help our listener understand where we are coming from. Preaching itself becomes a moment of compassionate witness when we name the pain and brokenness, and offer examples of God's incremental grace and healing in the midst of loss and tragedy.[51]

It seems prudent to offer a word of caution about providing examples of God's grace and healing in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event. Sermons are never able to resolve neatly the complexity of a broken world riddled with sin. The wake of a traumatic event is not the time to employ cheap grace. The key is ***incremental*** grace. Bearing witness to the small ways in which God is present and seen at work in the community and the world even amongst unbearable loss and devastation. The incremental grace in no way seeks to nullify the losses or erase the pain but is the balm for the wounded soul as the hymn *There is a Balm in Gilead* proclaims.

Likely a trauma event, any trauma event, will disrupt whatever plans and preparations a pastor has made for worship and preaching prior to the event. Sometimes the pastor has days to pivot while other times mere hours. No matter the amount of time, pivot is what the pastor must do to lead worship and preach God's Word to a particular people in a particular time and place. In a book entitled, *Crisis Preaching*, Joseph Jeter offers some practical strategies for those preparing to preach in moments of crisis. Regarding scriptural text selection he writes, "although all texts may be appropriate, some may be more helpful, vivid, and compelling than others for particular situations, and in many crises there is very little time to conduct a search for the best,

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51. Joni S. Sancken, *Words That Heal: Preaching Hope to Wounded Souls* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019), 97.

most useful word."[52] Lectionary preachers may be tempted to leave behind the lectionary text for the day, and those in the midst of sermon series may need to alter course in order for a more appropriate and helpful reading from scripture to be read and heard by those assembling for worship. Pastors need to give themselves permission and be at peace about these changes. Likewise, if the "perfect" word from scripture for the situation is not making itself known to the preacher, they need to make peace with that as well and trust that the Holy Spirit will bring forth the word the people need to hear, no matter which text is selected.

The work of trusting the Holy Spirit to be at work within and amongst us and the community is work that needs to be done in the preaching moment as much as in the worship planning and text selection moment. For preachers in mainline Protestant traditions in which preaching is a well-prepared and thought-out moment in worship, not an extemporaneous moment, this may prove challenging. Preachers may find comfort and encouragement when Sancken suggests, "Not being perfectionistic about the sermon and occasionally allowing 'the seams' to show can be more invitational to members with messy lives. In the immediate wake of local or broader traumatic events, listeners would rather have a relevant word that speaks to what is happening in our world than a perfect and well-researched sermon."[53] The aim of an excellent crisis sermon is to be a cup of cold water for someone who is absolutely parched standing out in the hot noon-day sun. Water may not be the most extravagant drink and it likely is not served in the finest glassware you have to offer, but extravagance and finery is not what is needed. The thirsty do not care if the water comes from the tap and served in a chipped glass or paper cup.

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52. Joseph R. Jeter, *Crisis Preaching: Personal and Public* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1998), 107.

53. Sancken, *Words that Heal*, 80.

What matters is their thirst is seen and in response to being seen they are offered something which will quench the need.

Conclusion

The gathering of God's people for worship and the proclamation of God's Word through preaching provide the space and the opportunity for communities to grieve, heal, and experience God's grace when acute natural disasters result in communal trauma. After it became clear that the residents of New Orleans would not be returning to their homes immediately some of the St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church (SCAPC) staff, and the entire pastoral staff, reconvened and began to work in Houston, Texas. Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church (MDPC) generously and hospitably provided housing to SCAPC staff in people's homes along with space at the church in which to work. Pastors, staff, and members of SCAPC were welcomed fully into the life of the MDPC congregation for approximately five weeks.[54]

While worship with MDPC on Sunday mornings was beautiful and excellent, one of the most meaningful and healing times occurred in a midweek worship service. On Wednesdays, while MDPC held their congregational dinner, choir rehearsals, and faith formation classes for children and adults, the pastors of SCAPC held worship in the chapel. These Wednesday worship services were "come as you are" services for SCAPC members and any other Katrina refugees located in the Houston area. Led by clergy marked by and carrying the same experience of displacement and isolation from the trauma of Hurricane Katrina as the congregation gathered,

54. Unfortunately, Hurricane Rita entered the Gulf of Mexico and the size and anticipated path of the storm resulted in the evacuation of parts of coastal Texas and portions of Houston. Due to the expected timeline for re-opening zip codes in New Orleans to residents it was determined that when the SCAPC staff evacuated Houston they would not reconvene there but rather closer to New Orleans.

these services provided space for the naming of losses and fears by people grappling with understanding, meaning, and making safe space for grieving and lamentation. We gathered, prayed, read and proclaimed God's Word, and sang familiar hymns unaccompanied and mostly off key. Simple, honest, vulnerable, and profoundly holy, these services allowed a displaced people to be together in community and share their grief with the hope that God's grace would be experienced through worship and provide healing over time. Worship, as a ritual of gathering, met the primary need for people to be together following a disaster.[55]

Ideally, gathering for worship occurs in the space and at the time the community is accustomed to gathering providing for continuity and familiarity. This is not always possible following a natural disaster, as is demonstrated in the experience of SCAPC in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. It also may not be possible as a community anticipates and prepares for a hurricane, as was the case for the Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church on Sunday, September 10, 2017 when Hurricane Irma made landfall. Many neighborhoods surrounding the church had been issued a mandatory evacuation notice because the storm was projected to make landfall in the Tampa Bay area. Using the church digital communication system, website and social media pages, the church encouraged its members to follow preparation guidelines and evacuation orders issued by local emergency management personnel and notified those members that though in-person worship was canceled, if power and internet were available on Sunday morning, a pastor would lead worship from their place of evacuation through Facebook Live and made available across all the church's digital platforms. Website statistics show five thousand views of this worship service as people gathered virtually for worship from their evacuation

55. Grosch-Miller, emphasizes that where trauma isolates, gathering in community for worship consoles, "Enabling the work" in *Tragedies and Christian Congregations*, 151.

spots. Using the familiar pattern of worship, the community was comforted and encouraged despite the fear of the unknown. The community gathered in spirit with a call to worship, opening prayer and hymn. We confessed our sins and heard again the assurance of God's mercy offered to us through Jesus Christ. We invited children to draw near for a special message using the congregation's accustomed song of welcome for them, "What Does the Lord Require of You?" We read and proclaimed scripture. We lifted up the Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer, and we affirmed our community identity and belief as we recited the Apostles' Creed before being sent back out with a Benediction.

As the people of God, communities of faith – created, loved, and redeemed – have a cohesive identity. Worship gathers the community and can enable them to move forward collectively and individually when experiencing communal trauma post-disaster. Preaching within such a context will focus and tend to the needs of the people to know that nothing will separate them from God's love, neither things present nor things to come. Who they are, and whose they are will not nor cannot be shaken by the disaster or the trauma experienced because of the disaster.

And then we'll remember
all that we lost
and finally learn
everything we never learned.
~Alexis Valdes

Appendix A – Liturgical Resources[56]

Calls to Worship

Come As You Are
L: Come as you are into God's presence, you are welcome here.
P: But I am tired and weary.
L: Tired and weary, you are welcome here. Come as you are into God's presence.
P: What if I am angry at what I have lost; afraid for what comes next?
L: Angry and afraid, you are welcome here. Come as you are into God's presence.
P: I am relieved and grateful; it could have been so much worse. I feel guilty because the loss and devastation is so great for so many.
L: Guilty or grateful, you are welcome here. Come as you are into God's presence.
All: We come into God's presence to worship the One who welcomes us here, just as we are.

Souls Longing Based on Psalm 42
L: O God, as a deer longs for flowing streams, so our souls long for you, living God.
P: Tears have been our food day and night as we are left with the rubble from the storm. Where are you, O God? When shall we see your face?
L: Hope in God; our help is in God who does not leave us alone.
P: We hope in God whom we worship. We shall praise the Lord, our help and our God.

Power and Holiness of God Based on Psalm 93
L: The Lord is king! Clothed in majesty and girded in strength.
P: The Lord has established the earth and it shall not be moved. The Lord's reign is everlasting.
L: The winds and waves have lifted up, O Lord, the winds have lifted up their voice; and the waves have lifted up their roaring.
P: Yet you, O Lord, are more majestic than the thunder of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea!
L: Let us worship God whose decrees are sure and whose kingdom is marked by holiness.

Peace! Be Still!
L: A great storm rose up, and we arrive to worship this day feeling battered and broken.
P: Like the disciples in the boat on the sea of Galilee, we too cry out to Jesus, "Lord, do you not care that we are perishing?"
L: Friends, Jesus heard those disciples cries and fear, and responded by rebuking the wind and waves, "Peace! Be Still!"
P: We remember. Even the wind and the sea obeyed him!
L: Trust that the one who speaks, and the wind and sea obey, also hears our cries and fears, sees the devastation and suffering from this storm.

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56. These liturgical resources have been created for use in the context of congregations affected by acute natural disasters, specifically hurricanes. The liturgy may be appropriate as is or with slight adaptations for other contexts which result in communal trauma.

All: We remember and worship God, who in care and with power, cried out, "Peace! Be Still!"

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, you created the earth and all that is in it. You formed us out of the dust of the earth, breathing life into our very beings, yet we have ignored your beloved act of creation and neglected our call to serve as stewards of creation. You called us from love and called us to love, yet we have turned our backs on your claim. As the Good Shepherd, you lead us down paths of hope and promise, and yet we have chosen fear, anxiety, and distrust.
Loving God re-create in us a new heart. Renew us in body, mind, and spirit to do your work in the world. Rekindle in us a love for creation, our neighbors and ourselves. Reaffirm our joy and assurance at being your beloved creation. As you hear our confession, may we hear your forgiveness, in the name of Christ our Risen Lord, Amen.

Prayers of the People

Creator God, as we gather this day with sighs too deep for words, it feels as though the created order has turned against your people. So, we turn to you in prayer, acknowledging our hearts are full of sadness as we look at the chaos and destruction brought about by the power of the hurricane. Each of us has been touched, though to varying degrees. Encourage those who have lost so much, who find themselves living amidst deep darkness. Grant us the grace to live in harmony and support of one another during this challenging time. If we need help, give us the courage and the words to ask. If we possess something that will help another, give us generous hearts to offer the resources needed by another.

The prayers of the people may continue with appropriate prayers of intercession for the church, world, and community.

Scripture Readings
Job 2:11-13 Presence while one suffers

Job 3 Job's lament

Psalm 13 Prayer for help in times of trouble

Psalm 22 Lament and song of praise

Psalm 23 The Lord is my shepherd

Psalm 46 God is our refuge and strength

Psalms 116-118 Prayers of thanksgiving and praise for God's deliverance and goodness

Psalm 121Hopeful promise of God's protection

Isaiah 58:6-12 You shall be called repairer of the breach

Lamentations 3:19-24 In the midst of suffering, hope and trust in God

Lamentations 5:1-22 A cry for mercy

Micah 6:8 What does the Lord require of you?

Matthew 5:1-12 The Beatitudes

Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41 or Luke 8:22-25 The disciples cry out in fear amid a storm and Jesus rebukes the elements

Matthew 12:25-30 Jesus says, "Come to me all who are weary."

Matthew 14:13-21 Feeding of the five thousand

Mark 14:32-36 Jesus prays deeply grieved in Gethsemane

John 6:15-25 Jesus walks on the water

John 11:1-37 The death of Lazarus and Jesus weeps

Romans 15:13 God of hope

Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always

Miscellaneous

The poem "Hope" has many possible uses for worship. Written in 2020 in response to the global pandemic this poem evokes strong storm imagery which provides an avenue for both preacher and congregation to enter the poem as a means of giving voice to the experience of an acute natural disaster. Excerpts of this poem would be appropriate for worship liturgy, or it could be used as an avenue to conversation and reflection during the sermon. Stanza 4, for example, provides an invitation to name what has been lost and what has been learned.

Hope by Alexis Valdes[57]

When the storm has passed
and the roads are tamed
and we are the survivors
of a collective shipwreck.

With a tearful heart
and our destiny blessed
we will feel joy
simply for being alive.

57. Alexis Valdes, "Esperanza" (2020). English translation by America Valdes, Nilo Cruz, and Alexis Valdes for *Let Us Dream* by Pope Francis.

And we'll give a hug
the first stranger
and praise our good luck
that we kept a friend.

And then we'll remember
all that we lost
and finally learn
everything we never learned.

And we'll envy no one
for all of us have suffered
and we'll not be idle
but more compassionate.

We'll value more what belongs to all
than what was earned.
We'll be more generous
and much more committed.

We'll understand how fragile
it is to be alive.
We'll sweat empathy
for those still with us and those who are gone.

We'll miss the old man
who asked for a buck in the market
whose name we never knew
who was always at your side.

And maybe the poor old man
was your God in disguise.
But you never asked his name
because you never had the time.
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And all will become a miracle.
And all will become a legacy.
And we'll respect the life,
the life we have gained.

When the storm passes
I ask you Lord, in shame
that you return us better,
as you once dreamed us.

Appendix B - Denominational Resources

Many denominations have committees or programs which focus on preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters. While this list is not exhaustive, these denominations have made available resources that may help clergy and other church leaders in communities impacted by disaster.

Disciples of Christ: https://disciples.org/resources/disaster-preparedness/

Episcopal Relief & Development: https://www.episcopalrelief.org/

Lutheran Disaster Response: https://www.elca.org/Lutheran-Disaster-Response/

Mennonite Disaster Services: https://mds.org/

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance: https://pda.pcusa.org/

United Church of Christ: https://www.ucc.org/emotional-care-in-disaster/

United Methodist Committee on Relief: https://www.umc.org/en/umcor

Each of these denominational entities partners with the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster. National VOAD is an association of organizations (faith-based, community-based, and other non-profit organizations) which promotes cooperation, communication, coordination, and collaboration to help alleviate the impact of disasters. Additional resources for congregations and communities on disaster preparedness and response may be found at https://www.nvoad.org/.

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