

“...Standing Firm...”

The eucharistic prayer we don't often use (“C”) is quite eloquent, as we pray, “this fragile earth, our island home...” (BCP, p. 370). The last several weeks have shown us all how fragile our earth really is: 3 major hurricanes and a devastating earthquake. Hundreds have died, thousands are homeless, tens of thousands are without power and basic necessities. In St. Paul's words, “The whole creation has been groaning in travail.” (Romans, 8:22)

These major natural catastrophes remind us all of how fragile, how precious life really is. And they can also remind us of the storms we have faced—the very literal natural challenges we've lived through, but far more frequently, the storms of human life, caused by illness, sin, evil, and death. Anxiety is a kind of storm; depression; confusion; a loss of faith. The challenge for all of us when a storm strikes is can we find hope? Can we live in hope? Can we keep hope alive? St. Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison, as he waited for his own execution. He knew Christians in Philippi were being persecuted, arrested, executed. Paul wrote to encourage them to keep hope alive, live with hope. He writes “I will know that you are standing firm...striving side by side...in no way intimidated by your opponents....”

Storms knock us down. Storms change our world. A hurricane or a cancer diagnosis can be hard to bear; they challenge our hope. Yet we believe in the God of hope who is always with us. We see this hope in Jesus facing his own death on the cross. We see this hope in the hearts of those, who throughout history, have persevered in the darkest of times: African American slaves 200 years ago; Jews sent to concentration camps 80 years ago; those who are persecuted today around the world.

The Old Testament lesson with God confronting Jonah, the Psalm, and the Gospel proclaiming the amazing generosity of God all echo St. Paul's encouragement to stand firm. Paul faced his own storm living with hope. This is the hope Paul shares with us. “May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Paul 15:13)