

“And After the Wind”

A Sermonette for Thanksgiving 2005

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St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church

Rabbi Edward Paul Cohn

After the wind – an earthquake; but the Lord was not  
 in the earthquake. After the earthquake – fire; but  
 the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire –  
 Kol D'mah-mah Dah-Kah  
 A Still-Small Voice  
 And behold, there came a voice unto him, and said:  
 What doest thou here, Elijah?

Well, like the Prophet Elijah, we too have heard and seen – and continue to see  
 and live with – the dramatic effects of the storm.

We are all too conversant with the full array of Nature's awesome might – the  
 force of the rain, the misery of the flood, and the rage of the winds:

And yet, as it was with Elijah, you and I may perceive God's presence in the Kol  
 D'mah-mah Dakah: in the Still-Small Voice (or, as some translate, "a soft murmuring  
 sound") that succeeds the tumultuous whirlwind.

This Still-Small Voice calls us to give thanks this year because, though many and  
 much are lost, we remain to tell the story of inspiring heroism and steadfast courage.

Yes – there were those who were in trusted leadership and rescue positions:  
 national, state, and local, who could have and should have done better. But, there were  
 many more who stood the unprecedented test and selflessly risked their lives at great peril  
 to save the helpless.

Yes – there were some who took advantage of the chaotic circumstances and  
 brazenly engaged in uncivilized acts. But far, far more of our people extended the  
 boundaries of charity, mercy, and human love by their acts of conscience, restraint, and  
 compassion.

Let the world and the nation hesitate to judge our region, our city, and its people,  
 because they were not here and it was not in their homes that the water rose and the  
 winds shook the foundations.

They have, thank God, never lived in a Babel where the communications systems  
 were non-existent and where mother and father could not speak with, let alone locate,  
 beloved children and vice-versa. And it was the same with siblings and spouses, and  
 grandparents and beloved friends. Our generations only longed to embrace each other in  
 grateful reunion and miraculous safety.

No, I say, let the others refrain from their judging, though shame on us if, in  
 enduring the bitter experience, we fail to seize upon and act upon the urgent lessons we  
 ought to have learned.

Someone told me recently that there are no proofs for the existence of God – there are only witnesses! Like the Prophet Elijah in the wake of the storm – the winds and fire – haven't we, too, heard a Still-Small Voice? We are witnesses that God is with us in our storm evacuations today as in the Exiles of Isaiah and Jeremiah almost 3000 years ago. This awareness consoles and reassures us that under our FEMA roofs, we are not alone in our pain and our shock, our frustrations, and our weariness.

For as we lift our hearts in fervent prayer on behalf of those whose loss and wounds are far greater and deeper than our own, we are also grateful witnesses to that saving truth crystallized by the philosopher Martin Buber.

Our God is not so much to be found in either people  
or places. God resides instead in relationships.

Now, we are no strangers to one another. For almost 20 years now, our congregations have dreamt together; labored together; laughed and wept together; celebrated peace and despaired of warfare. And, we have given thanks together!

We are able to declare our genuine love for one another because we have remained mindful of what hurts one another.

The winds are gone. The flood has receded. The time for prudent planning and determined building is at hand.

Listen dear ones to a Kol D'mah-mah Da-kah-a – a Still-Small Voice, and find healing, find courage and find rest. For your loving friendships, for your trust, for our ability to worship together in our rich diversity of traditions, for this great nation and its generous people, for the honor and glory of the One that created us – let us give thanks and bless the Lord our God.

Amen