

# GOD IS MOVING FURNITURE

‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.’ But he answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah’. Mt 12: 38-40

There have been a few big-time summer thunderstorms in this area in the past week or two. I’m not sure if you have experienced that same in your part of town. When the thunder gets so close as to scare the kids, Yn. Anna tells them that God is bowling or moving furniture. I like to think that he is moving furniture because he is doing some serious housecleaning; moving everything this way and that so as to clean up well around it.

And it looks a lot like God was doing housecleaning after last week’s storm was over. Not only does everything smell and look cleaner from the rain, but also trees and branches were rearranged. The wind was so strong in this neighborhood that it shook loose many dead branches and left quote a mess to clean up. Some of you know how many heavy dead branches there are to drag to the dumpster after this types of storm shakes up our church’s many beautiful Royal Palms.

Well I think that the way God does housecleaning in nature, reflects a very a similar way he wants it to work in our spiritual lives. Though I often can only see this in retrospect, I can’t count the number of times where God has allowed stormy circumstances to move in on my life and shake loose some of the “lifeless branches” I’ve been refusing to let go of. Sometimes it’s something that once was good, like a way I used to pray to God or preach about him, but that way is no longer bearing fruit. More often, for me, it’s something that’s not so good, like a bad habit I’ve slid into, an indifference that has crept up on me or a stubborn attitude that is preventing my continued growth. The problem is that I am so hard of hearing and so stubbornly stuck in my ways that I have trouble ‘letting go and letting God.’ This hardness of hearing and hardness of heart would certainly explain why God is sometimes so loud when he’s bowling and moving furniture, and why storms are such a necessity for spiritual growth. Otherwise we might never grow at all.

That’s the hard news that Jesus is giving the scribes and Pharisees in today’s Gospel reading. They want to fit Jesus into a part of their lives, into the old laws and customs they control. Jesus says to them in so many words that God doesn’t fit into your plan, you must fit into God’s. They want to talk about the laws of Moses which they mastered, but Jesus, mysteriously and out of nowhere, wants to talk about the sign of Jonah.

As Fr. Jonah, I know all too well about my namesake, and why Jesus references him here. I expect you might too. Jonah is the poster child for disobedience, stubbornness and resentment, basically all you don’t want in a prophet and person of God. Because of his hardness of heart, God allowed the mother of all storms to descend upon Jonah, knocking down nearly everything this man had built his life on. But just when it seemed that nothing would survive, Jonah finds sanctuary in the belly of a fish; and in three days is brought back from the depths.

Though it is hard to listen to and harder to admit, we need Jesus’ reminder about the prophet Jonah and the spiritual value of storms in our lives. We need nature’s reminders when God goes bowling and moves furniture around. For only then do we notice the lifeless limbs in our yards and the lifeless limbs in our lives that God would have us get rid of to clear the way for future, stronger growth. But we are all Jonahs at heart, with parts of our selves that we cling stubbornly too, no matter how bad they might be for us.

Today however, let us learn to properly read the signs of Jonah in our lives. Rather than avoiding and denying the storms of suffering and uncertainty that come with life, let us see them as opportunities provided by God to get rid of whatever has shaken loose and discover new blessings. For this is the paradox of the Christian faith and our lives, that rebirth springs from death and that the way up to God passes down through many a storm. This is the way of the cross.

May we have the ears to hear God’s voice in our lives before he resorts to thunder and knocking things about to fix our attention on what is best for us. And when any branch breaks away from our lives, may we trust that it will be renewed and restored by the tree life of life, Christ’s own cross, in which all things blossom eternally, now and always, amen.