

Some may wonder why we should be worrying about disaster preparation within the church. There are several instances in the Bible, from both the Hebrew and the Greek texts we can see disaster preparations being made and preparations for new life. The problem is, the stories are seen in other ways and not as preparedness. There's an old joke about a man who is told to evacuate his house because a flood is coming, and the water starts to rise and a person in a canoe comes by and offers him a ride saying "Get in, it's going to get really bad and you need to leave." But the man in the house said, "No, God will take care of me, I prayed, and he will send me a miracle." And the man in that canoe says suit yourself but you better leave." The water continues to rise and the man is looking out a window from the second floor when a bigger boat comes by, and he is offered yet another way to get out of the flooding, and again he says "God will bring me a miracle", and the bigger boat leaves. The next time we hear from this man he is on top of his roof with waves lapping at him and a helicopter comes by and they holler down, "grab the rope and we will take you to

safety.” Again, he answers, “God will save me”. Well the waters continue to rise and sadly to say the man drowns. As he gets to heaven and stands before God he asks, “Why didn’t you save me, I prayed to you and asked for a miracle and you didn’t give me one.” And God responds, “I sent you a canoe, a boat, and a helicopter, what more do you want.”

Unfortunately, this tends to be the disaster preparation for far too many people. We often fail to see the opportunities for us to save ourselves before it’s too late. We are often the prayer from God to someone else before, during, and after a disaster. That is what preparedness is about, saving ourselves, our families, and our communities **before** we face that crisis.

Our text today comes from Genesis 41:37-54. This text is about Joseph, the technicolor color coat one not the husband of Mary, and it comes after he had interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams and gained the leaders trust.

Hear the word of the Lord.

37The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.
38Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?” 39So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. 40You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you.”
41And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” 42Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph’s hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck.
43He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command; and they cried out in front of him, “Bow the knee!” Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.” 45Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife.
Thus, Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt.

46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. 47 During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. 48 He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. 49 So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure. 50 Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. 51 Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” 52 The second he named Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.” 53 The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; 54 and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. 55 When all the land of Egypt was famished,

the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do." 56 And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the store houses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. 57 Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

This is the Word of the Lord.

There is a lot going on in this text. First, we need to realize that Pharaoh was not only giving Joseph power over the whole of Egypt, he was making him part of the royal family. That way no one could question his authority. He was given a new name and a wife from the nobility. Joseph, who as a child was discarded by his brothers, is now adopted into the family of the most powerful ruler in the world. We see something similar in John 10 when Jesus takes the children into his arms and blesses them. In the first century, taking a

child into your arms and embracing them was a sign of adoption, but I'll come back to Jesus later.

If you remember Joseph had warned Pharaoh that there was a time of famine approaching, but first there would be seven years of plenty. Verse 48 we learn of what Joseph did, he starts to gather the food. This was a big job and he would have had agents to carry out the collection, part of which was making sure nothing was wasted. In this verse the word food is used three times, this is probably telling us that they were collecting more than grain to prepare for this famine. Most of the food collected, especially the grain, was as a tax. After seven years of plenty came the famine, just as Joseph predicted. This famine did not only plague Egypt, it was affecting all of the lands, but because Joseph had made preparations, Egypt had bread. As the famine started to set in people began using their personal reserves, which started people panicking and they knew Joseph had stored the grain in the silos. But he wouldn't release it. The people went to Pharaoh and complained, but he told them whatever Joseph

tells you to do, that is what you will do. I just want to interject, when was the last time you saw a politician stay the hard course against the popular opinion of the public to do what was right and good for the people and the country. But I digress. Some interpretations suspect Joseph made sure all of the people in the country were feeling the strain of the famine, even the upper class, before he started to release the grain from storage. He rationed the food, which probably means he distributed food to the poor while selling it to other Egyptians and people from other countries.

Joseph was the canoe, boat, and helicopter for Egypt, he saved them. God sent this person to save not only the land of the Pharaoh, but also the other lands. God sent this man to interpret dreams and do what was necessary to save the lives of people. Joseph didn't relent when popular pressure was bearing down, he knew that all people would need help, especially the poor.

Most studies of the story of Joseph, revolve around his families, both his Hebrew and Egyptian families, his ability to interpret dreams and saving the people of Egypt and other lands. The one thing that is glossed over in commentaries is the preparation for a disaster that took place. Even the Bible only gives it the minimum amount of space needed. If it wasn't for Joseph preparing for a catastrophic disaster, nothing else would matter. Even if he interprets the dreams, but does nothing, this story ends with a famine which would likely have devastated the areas of Northern Africa and the Middle East as we know them today. If not for Joseph's preparations, the Bible might not have ever come to pass because the Israelites might have been wiped out. I know what I'm throwing out is speculation to some degree, but it is preparation for a disaster that allows the Biblical story to continue.

There are other biblical stories that are based on preparation for a disaster. In Joseph's case he was a leader, but Noah, he followed the instructions God gave him. Noah

built an ark. The disaster preparation manual for the great flood had to be enormous. Today when we are told to evacuate, we gather up our family, the pets (yes, just like Noah we save the animals), grab the important documents and we are out the door, in the car, and headed somewhere else. Unless it's a tornado and in that case don't get in the car, and I ask that if you don't already know where to take cover you to figure that out today. For us, escaping a natural disaster is far easier than for Noah, he had to build an ark, from scratch. I'm sure there are some in worship here who have helped on a Habitat for Humanity build as I have, some of us have lead builds, I grew up around it because my grandfather was a carpenter. So, building an ark should be no big deal, just go down to Lowe's and pick up all the supplies, right. We forget he had to cut the lumber so he could follow the directions to build the big boat that would pick up all of the animals and humanity. God gave Noah the natural disaster preparedness guidelines and he followed them.

In the Gospels we have a great example of training for a disaster, except this is not one that comes from nature, but by the hand of man. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance has a designation of man-made disasters, an event that is created or caused by humans. In this case it is the victim who is training others to deal with his death. Jesus spent three years in disaster preparedness training with his disciples. He spent his ministry preparing them for the work that would come after his death. Granted this is not a direct parallel to what we would define as a man-made disaster, but for Jesus' first century followers this was a disaster caused by another human. For those of us who can remember the assassination of JFK and how it affected the nation, that could be seen as a similar event. But Jesus was the one doing the preparation so the apostles could carry on the word of God after the disaster of his death. Imagine what would have happened if Jesus hadn't prepared them to carry on his message, would Christianity have ever had a chance?

Mission Presbytery is creating a disaster preparedness document that will help individuals, congregations, communities, and the presbytery to prepare for and have action plans for rescue and recovery. Our presbytery covers what the American Red Cross designates as the number one and number four most prone areas for a disaster. It is through preparedness, as we can see in the Bible, that we are able to not only survive, but help our family, friends, and neighbors. I have spent my life in and around disasters, I grew up with tornados, have been caught in wildfires, and have ridden out more hurricanes then I can count and have seen the tragedy of man-made events. What makes the difference in communities that survive and recover and those that languish and die after a disaster is leadership, people willing to step up in this church and in this community, like Joseph, willing to stand up and do what is right to make sure everyone has the ability to survive. We need to make sure to prepare like Noah, follow the directions before, during, and after an event. We need to step forward and help those who can't fend for themselves, the

elderly, the young, and those with special needs have to be identified as part of our preparations so we can make sure they survive. In the past few years our presbytery has been hit with fires, tornados, floods, and a hurricane, with man-made disasters occurring in communities of West and Sutherland Springs. We need to be like Jesus, by training people for the eventuality of a disaster, to carry on and helping those in need. We need to make intelligent, thoughtful preparations and not react based on fear and inuendo. Our preparations cannot be exclusive, focusing only on our individual family or congregation, we are strongest when we are inclusive with all people, all cultures being welcomed. I want to point back to John 10 and Jesus embracing, adopting the children, he brought into his family those considered the lowest of the low and told us that we must be like the children if we are to enter the kingdom. We must be willing to help everyone just like a child who is willing to accept all people without discrimination.

Don't wait for a disaster to begin your preparations, because it could happen today. Become involved and help the church and community prepare. It is an enormous task that can seem daunting when approached by one individual, but if we find leadership, follow the preparedness plans, and train people in what to do and help our neighbors, we are following the Word of God and living into the teachings of Jesus Christ.