

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**  
**Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 1, 2017 – Communion**  
**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**

**Luke 10:30-35 (The Five Gospels)**

**FOR REFLECTION**

Someday, Pastor [Joel Osteen], the waters in Houston will recede and homes will be rebuilt and normalcy will eventually return there. And to a large degree the attention and the pressure you've received this week will find other places to reside, and you will return to the work and the life you've had before, relatively unaffected.

It's then that I hope you'll remember this week. It's then I hope you'll recall the parable Jesus tells of the Good Samaritan, who though a despised pariah in the place he found himself, responded to a stranger's need with immediacy and vigor while the religious people walked right by. This Samaritan showed mercy, not because he was guilted into it or because he was asked—but simply because he knew that we are one another's keepers; that we each have resources we are entrusted with, and the way we share or hoard those resources reflect our hearts...

...Don't wait for an invitation. Jesus already gave you one.

~ John Pavlovitz, <https://johnpavlovitz.com/2017/08/31/dear-joel-osteen/>

**Biblical Proportions**

Things have been happening. Big things. People have been referring to some big things – like Hurricane Harvey's Houston hit – as a "Flood of Biblical Proportions." What that means is:

Of or pertaining to a natural disaster or other cataclysmic event so immense that it brings to mind biblical accounts of horrific catastrophes. "The tsunami wrought destruction of biblical proportions." (figuratively) By extension, of or pertaining to a thing or occurrence having vast size, extent, or consequences.

Of-biblical-proportions dictionary definition | of-biblical-proportions ...  
[www.yourdictionary.com/of-biblical-proportions](http://www.yourdictionary.com/of-biblical-proportions)

It also means that the event is bigger than we imagined it could be. And it is a relative term. For instance, here are some stats on Harvey's effects on Texas and Louisiana this week from CBS Chicago:

1) In some places, Harvey dumped more than **50 inches of rain**—shattering storm records for the continental United States. [In some places, it takes a year or more to achieve this rainfall – as we well know in CA.]

2) According to published reports about 30 percent of Harris County, which includes Houston, is under water. That's about **530 square miles**—more than twice the size of Chicago.

3) Forecasters estimate Harvey dumped about **15 to 20 trillion gallons of water** across Texas. [One of Chicago's three flood control reservoirs will hold about 10 billion gallons of water when complete in 2029. Harvey would fill it 1,500 to 2,000 times over.] [We have 14 dams in the greater Los Angeles area. I could not find information about their capacity but I'm guessing the total is nowhere near 15 trillion gallons.]

4) Over 15 hours, officials said there were **56,000 calls made to 911** in the Houston area. Typically, they handle about 8,000.

<http://chicago.cbslocal.com/2017/08/30/hurricane-harvey-by-the-numbers/>

MIC Network which caters to millennials – and, thankfully, offers important news coverage in understandable language – has these statistics (citing sources) published August 30:

**21 trillion**

Number of gallons of rainfall that had fallen in Texas and Louisiana as of Tuesday night...

**130 [mph]**

The estimated maximum sustained winds recorded as the hurricane made landfall near Rockport, Texas, on Aug. 25...

**51.88**

Inches of rainfall in Cedar Bayou, Texas, as of Tuesday afternoon...[breaking] the record for rainfall from a single storm in the continental United States...

**13,000**

Number of people that have been rescued in the Houston area as of Wednesday morning...

**30,000**

Number of people who are expected to be forced out of their homes due to Hurricane Harvey...

**30**

Number of reported deaths that have occurred as a result of the hurricane...[as of] Wednesday morning.

**49,000**

Number of homes that had suffered flood damage as of Wednesday morning... more than 1,000 homes have been destroyed in the storm.

**\$51 billion to \$75 billion**

Estimate on the overall economic cost of Hurricane Harvey...

<https://mic.com/articles/184145/harvey-by-the-numbers-here-are-the-statistics-behind-the-500-year-flood-ravaging-the-gulf-coast#.UqOVJWS5P>

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, an article was published by Al Jazeera citing some different figures:

The death toll from monsoon floods in India, Bangladesh and Nepal has climbed above **1,200**, as rescue workers scramble to provide aid to millions of people stranded by the worst such disaster in years.

All three countries suffer frequent flooding during the June-September monsoon season, but international aid agencies say things are worse this year with **thousands of villages cut off** and people deprived of food and clean water for days...

Government officials in **India's eastern state of Bihar** told Reuters news agency on Friday that at least 379 people had been killed over the past few days, with thousands sheltered in relief camps away from their inundated homes.

"This year farming has collapsed due to floods and we will witness a sharp rise in unemployment," said Anirudh Kumar, a disaster management official in Patna - the capital of poor Bihar state known for mass migration to cities in search of jobs...

**In Nepal**, 150 people have been killed and **90,000 homes destroyed** in what the United Nations is calling the worst flooding there in a decade.

**In Bangladesh**, at least 134 people have died and **more than 5.7 million were affected directly** as monsoon flooding submerged more than a third of the low-lying and densely populated country.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/floods-kill-1200-india-nepal-bangladesh-170826230610924.html>

So, we have a death toll of over 1,200 in India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

90,000 homes destroyed in Nepal alone.

We have millions of people stranded in South Asia.

And the term "biblical proportions" takes on a whole new meaning.

You may be aware that we have a fire burning in La Tuna Canyon, Tujunga, Burbank Hills and Glendale. It is being called "one of the largest in LA history." It has scorched about 5,800 acres and there have been evacuations.

<http://www.scpr.org/news/2017/09/02/75263/la-tuna-fire-latest/>

Meanwhile:

**Montana**, has been burning up for months with very little coverage or outrage at the lack of help...from our Federal Government. As of July 24, 2017, Montana has considered the numerous large wildfires a state emergency, with the executive order coming from Governor Bullock. After already leaving multiple fires to burn for months, this executive order finally allowed for Montana to utilize resources such as the National Guard and other state services to combat the destruction being caused by fires.

To put this in perspective, on August 29th, 2017 evacuation orders were given to more than 1,100 homes in the Seeley Lake area of Western Montana. Thousands more homes and families are being put in danger by various other fires throughout the state including those in Lolo, MT and throughout Ravalli County. There was no way of knowing that these fires would become such huge problems... [as] they were quick to ignite through lightning strikes. Because of this, there was very little warning for people to get their personal items or pets and livestock together before having to leave their homes. Thousands of people are being forced to find temporary housing situations...

<https://www.theodysseyonline.com/frustration-hurricane-harvey>

Montana has fewer people – so this news gets put on a back burner. But it kinda puts our little nuisance of a fire (being fought in 106 degree, highly humid weather by heroic firefighters mind you!) into perspective.

So, what, you might say, does this have to do with the Good Samaritan – perhaps the most well-known parable of them all – a parable of biblical proportions? It has to do with our response to disasters of biblical proportions – a response that must be comparable in size and shape to what is happening.

Rev. Joel Osteen, Senior Pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, has caught major flak on social media for not opening his mega-church to aid flood refugees – while a dozen local mosques were open from the first moment. He is accused of hypocrisy (being the 8<sup>th</sup> wealthiest pastor in the United States) and missing an opportunity to teach true Christianity. When asked about his lack (and then late) response, he said, “...the city didn’t ask us to become a shelter...”

Rev. John Pavlovich, a “left-leaning” pastor who “has served for over 18 years at the North Raleigh Community Church, a Non-denominational church in Raleigh, North Carolina, wrote a beautiful and pastoral response – a snippet of which you will find in your bulletin.

He asks that Pastor Osteen (not to mention all of us):

...recall the parable Jesus tells of the Good Samaritan, who though a despised pariah in the place he found himself, responded to a stranger’s need with immediacy and vigor while the religious people walked right by. This Samaritan showed mercy, not because he was guilted into it or because he was asked—but simply because he knew that we are one another’s keepers; that we each have resources we are entrusted with, and the way we share or hoard those resources reflect our hearts...

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We are asked by G-d to offer charity and compassionate action proportionate to the disaster – and in the case of massive flooding (in Houston or India) – a response of biblical proportions. We don't wait to be asked – Jesus already asked us – so we just do it. I may have mentioned this before, but many Burners – having learned radical self-reliance on the playa – are first responders to disasters. They have the skills – they put them to use for others.

Currently, those managing disasters don't want shipments of food or clothing. They need money to get the right resources to the right places fast. You have a handout that suggests some ways to respond. We have a denomination that is good at this. You may have more ideas that you can share with us this morning.

Let's roll.

**Scripture Reading for Sunday September 1, 2017 – Pentecost 13 – Year A**

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### **Luke 10:30-35 (The Five Gospels)**

30 There was a man going from Jerusalem down to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and went off, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by coincidence a priest was going down that road; when he caught sight of him, he went out of his way to avoid him. 32 In the same way, when a Levite came to the place, he took one look at him and crossed the road to avoid him. 33 But this Samaritan who was traveling that way came to where he was and was moved to pity at the sight of him. 34 He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring olive oil and wine on them. He hoisted him onto his own animal, brought him to an inn, and looked after him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins, which he gave to the innkeeper, and said, "Look after him, and on my way back I'll reimburse you for any extra expense you have had."

## Ways to Help Right Now

**Checks made out to Mt. Hollywood UCC – (to be forwarded to the Conference and National) – can be marked for:**

“Neighbors in Need” addressing U.S. disasters

“One Great Hour of Sharing” addressing International disasters

Or just “Wider Church Ministries”

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**From Southern California Nevada Conference Staff:**

Dear Friends,

As we gather as communities of faith tomorrow, many of our members will be asking "what can we do to help those who have been displaced by Hurricane Harvey?"

**What we have learned is that the greatest need in the Harvey response is money.** Cash donations allow local relief agencies to purchase specific items when they are needed, and as a side effect, they help the local economy. **You can send money to the Conference, which will forward the funds to UCC's Wider Church Ministries, for disaster relief.**

The CHHSM organization, **Retirement Housing Foundation**, which is headquartered in Long Beach, is partnering with the United Church of Christ's Emergency USA Fund for Hurricane Harvey Relief, a special fund designated to specifically help the communities and residents impacted by this storm. **100% of the donations received will go directly to efforts supporting essential on-the-ground relief efforts.** For those who choose to respond with a tax-deductible gift through RHF, **donations received through September 30, 2017 will be matched up to a grand total of \$50,000 and sent through the Emergency USA Fund. (So if RHF receives \$50,000, they will respond with \$100,000 in total aid.)**

To participate in this matching opportunity, you can make your gift online or mail your check payable to RHF Charitable Foundation, noting "Hurricane Harvey" on the memo line and send to:

RHF - Disaster Relief  
911 North Studebaker Road  
Long Beach, CA 90815

**The second greatest need is Clean Up Buckets, which can be sent to Church World Service.**

CWS has a very specific list of what should go into each bucket and where they can be sent. For information about Clean Up Buckets, use this link: <http://cwskits.org/assemble-kits/emergency-cleanup-buckets/>

**The UCC Disaster Ministries will donate up to \$250 in matching grants to congregations toward the cost of buckets (about \$75 per bucket, plus shipping and an administrative fee.)** To learn about these grants, use this link: [http://www.ucc.org/disaster\\_2017\\_matching\\_grants\\_for\\_cws\\_kits\\_home\\_page](http://www.ucc.org/disaster_2017_matching_grants_for_cws_kits_home_page)

**There is also a great need for Hygiene Kits, which cost about \$25 to assemble.** For information about Hygiene Kits, use this link: <http://cwskits.org/assemble-kits/hygiene-kits/>

**One final note.** People are very generous and want to give. Sadly, as most relief workers will tell you, far too often there is an inpouring of goods from well-intentioned people that are not helpful. **Please do not send clothing, shoes, stuffed animals, toys, or school supplies at this point.** The effort now is still focused on clean up. Money, Clean Up Buckets, and Hygiene Kits are what will make the greatest difference at this point. \* **Thank you for your caring. Thank you for your generosity. \* Your SCNC UCC Staff**