

WEDNESDAY DEVOTION - GATEKEEPERS WORKCAMP 2018

Hurricane Floyd hit Eastern NC on September 16, 1999, before any of this year's youth volunteers were born, but most of you have probably heard a lot about it. What do you know about Hurricane Floyd? What have you heard about it from your parents and grandparents? Was your family, your home, your family's business affected directly? For adults, what are some of your memories of Hurricane Floyd? (Use the attached summary to tell the story if you need or want to, or tell your own stories. Some of the numbers included may help to bring perspective to the extent of the devastation to our community)

Isaiah 43 was written to a people who were recovering from a big storm. The Israelites had not faced a hurricane but a political and military upheaval so devastating it had changed them forever. The Babylonians had defeated their nation and sent the leaders, educated class, and skilled workers into exile for over two generations. Now they were returning home to a nation that was destroyed—physically, psychologically, and spiritually. They felt abandoned by God and hopeless. But in the midst of their despair, as they looked over their nation in ruins, God through the prophet Isaiah speaks a word of hope: **But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior, because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you. Do not fear, for I am with you . . . Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (Isaiah 43:1-5, 18-19)**

Our faith does not say that God *causes* devastating events like natural disasters, wars, terrorist attacks, illnesses, or death to happen to us. Tragic and difficult things happen in our limited and imperfect world, sometimes caused by the terrible choices of limited and imperfect people. Our faith does teach us, as Isaiah says, that in the midst of the storms and tragedies of life, God is with and will never leave us. In whatever circumstances we face, good or bad, God is always at work to do a new thing and to offer us life and hope.

In Rocky Mount, the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd left many challenges we never could have imagined, and it also brought previously unknown opportunities for cooperation and positive change:

- *Residents from every part of our community put aside political, racial, denominational, and economic differences to help one another, giving water, food, shelter, time, energy, and love to one another
- *Some of the neighborhoods that were destroyed have been turned into beautiful parks which now create opportunities for bringing the community together (Such as Sunset Park, the Dog Park, etc)
- *Some FEMA grants were able to be used for community development projects, such as the Imperial Centre, which have brought jobs and tourist dollars to Rocky Mount
- *What others do you know about?

- *How does knowing some of this history change your perspective about where you live?
- *How can we continue to work together to promote growth, recovery, and positive change in our community?
- *How can you see God at work doing “a new thing” in the midst of difficult circumstances?
- *How can God use us and other faith communities to transform our community?

Pray for our city. Pray for those who are hurting because of financial hardship, physical disabilities, community divisions and tensions, family disputes, grief, loneliness, hopelessness. Pray for Gatekeepers volunteers, our congregations, other agencies and ministries, and all those who are working to improve life in our city. Pray that God will give us strength, courage, and creativity to make positive changes and to go wherever we are called to share Christ's love with our entire community and beyond. Pray that we might see God's presence at work among us, and that the work we do might be the presence of God in someone's life. (Ask someone to close in prayer).

FOR WEDNESDAY'S DEVOTION
A Journey of Recovery: Nineteen Years After Hurrigan Floyd

When people in Rocky Mount went to bed on September 15, 1999, the rains had started and the wind was blowing, but it seemed like a typical late-summer hurricane. The enormous Category 4 Hurricane Floyd, which had hit the Bahamas the day before, had weakened and, rather than hitting Florida directly, had skirted the Atlantic coastline before turning into NC. We had seen this before many times: some wind and rain, maybe a few trees down, maybe the power would be out for a day or two. But in the early morning of September 16, Floyd decided to linger over eastern NC for a while, adding over two feet of rain to the 20 inches Hurricane Dennis had brought just two weeks earlier. But by mid-morning, the sun was shining in a beautiful blue sky over Rocky Mount that day as residents began to clean up debris from their yards and feel thankful we had avoided a direct hit.

But as the afternoon and evening of September 16 went on, it became clear that Floyd had not been so kind to us after all. The already swollen rivers and streams could not handle the water that had been poured into them by Floyd, and overnight and into the early hours of September 17, Rocky Mount and many surrounding communities began to flood. The water rose so quickly in areas that had never flooded before that people were caught off guard, and many were awakened in the middle of the night to water rushing into their homes. In Rocky Mount alone, 500 people had to be rescued by boat from their homes and vehicles, and some were even pulled to safety out of trees. Over 3,000 homes in our town were destroyed or heavily damaged, along with dozens of businesses and public buildings. About one-third of the land area of Rocky Mount was under water, with the hardest-hit areas near the Tar River and the creeks which feed it. For example, the Tarrytown area on 301 left businesses like Lowes, IHOP, and KFC with only their roofs visible above the water. When the water finally receded, 52 people in Eastern NC had died, people were left without power for weeks, homes and livelihoods were destroyed, and our community would never be the same.

Nineteen years later, we are still seeing some of the lingering effects of Hurricane Floyd as our community continues to work to rebuild financially and to recover psychologically. Many residents who lost their homes moved away from Rocky Mount, never to return; businesses closed for good; jobs were lost; entire neighborhoods were demolished. It is no wonder that it has taken us this long to turn a corner toward restoration and recovery, but there are many signs that Rocky Mount is finally gaining ground.