

9-28-2008, Two Weeks after Hurricane Ike
Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson

The Exiles Return
Jeremiah 31:1-10

This last week has been lonely. Week before last we had crews working together on the church yard every day. And last Sunday we those of us who were in town got together for worship. But a lot of folks were still out of town. Then, this week, without any electricity or telephone at the church, we couldn't do anything. I tried. But in this electronic age there is just nothing you can do in an office without electricity. The staff and I would come up here sporadically, just in case somebody came by. But very few people did come by.

Every day, I would look up here at the church and see this empty parking lot, and this was a lonely looking place.

On Friday afternoon, when the power came on, people just magically starting appearing. Most of them didn't know we had power. They just felt a need to come by the church and check on it. It felt so good to see the church family beginning to gather together again.

I thought of the Israelites who lived in exile for forty years. They had been conquered by the Babylonians and scattered all over that part of the world. They missed their families and their neighbors. They longed for the Temple and their way of life. They were lonely and homesick.

And God sent the prophets to tell them not to lose heart. One day they would return to their home.

After forty years the Persians conquered the Babylonians, and the Persian king gave the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem.

Many of them, when they got within sight of Jerusalem, broke down and cried. Their tears were tears of joy for finally getting back home, and they were tears of sorrow, as they saw the devastation that had been wreaked on the land, and as they knew that even though they had returned home, it would not be the same.

In a small way, we can understand what they experienced.

We are back home. And that feels wonderful. It felt even better when we got our electricity back.

We have experienced a whole different meaning to the phrase, "the haves and the have nots." It has nothing to do with whether you are wealthy or not. No. For the past two weeks the first thing people have been saying to each other is, "Do you have electricity?" We have been a two-class society: those who have electricity and those who don't have electricity.

And home really isn't home without electricity. Our whole way of life is built around electrical appliances. At first, it was kind of fun living without electricity. It was novel. It was like camping out without having to put up tents. As long as the weather wasn't too bad, it was kind of fun—having barbeque every meal; gathering around the flashlights and lanterns, talking to one another at night, without the television and the computer. I rediscovered the joy of reading books for entertainment, and I even read by

flashlight. It was nice going to bed when the sun went down and getting up early in the morning.

Like I say, it was kind of nice, even fun. For awhile. But it began to get old. I was at the barbershop yesterday, and I heard one of the guys say, "If I don't eat barbeque meat again for a long time, that will be fine with me."

After awhile, you start missing the routines of daily living. Even if you are home, it's not really home without those routines.

So, it was good when the lights finally came back on. At last life could get back to normal.

Although, it really isn't back to normal. There is still a lot of cleaning up and fixing up to do. We all worked hard to get our lawns cleaned up. But there are a lot of other little things to do, and that will take a while.

And, then too, we really don't want life to go back to being completely normal. I really do plan on reading more and spending less time watching television. I hope that our families can spend more time talking to one another and less time on the computers. I plan on getting to bed at a decent hour and getting a good night's sleep. That's been nice.

But, most of all, I hope that we will appreciate our friends and our neighbors and our church family even more. I hope we will remember when they were gone and how much we missed them.

The people have been gathered together. We have come from every direction. We all have stories to tell of how we survived Hurricane Ike and its aftermath.

We come home rejoicing and giving praise to God. We are home again with our families and our friends, our neighbors and our church family.

Thank God.

Dr. Wesley Welborn
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