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A Word from Woody...

Katrina and Christianity

August 29th for New Orleans lives in infamy as the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina's devastation. How does such violent storm comport with the biblical God who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and loving?

Atheist and best-selling author Sam Harris sees a fatal contradiction here. In his 2006 book *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Harris writes, "Examples of God's failure to protect humanity are everywhere to be seen. The city of New Orleans, for instance, was recently destroyed by a hurricane. More than a thousand people died; tens of thousands lost all their earthly possessions; and nearly a million were displaced. It is safe to say that almost every person living in New Orleans at the moment Hurricane Katrina struck shared your belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, and compassionate God. But what was God doing while Katrina laid waste to their city? Surely He heard the prayers of those elderly men and women who fled the rising waters for the safety of their attics, only to be slowly drowned there. These were people of faith. These were good men and women who had prayed throughout their lives. Do you have the courage to admit the obvious? These poor people died talking to an imaginary friend" (p. 52).



What are we to make of Harris's observation? Let me say initially, as a native New Orleanian who loves this city and her people, Harris is a little too generous in his characterization of New Orleans. While "almost every person" in the city may well intellectually believe the biblical God exists and could be called vaguely "people of faith", these same folk, from my experience, could not be easily characterized on the whole as passionate, obedient followers of this God. New Orleans has not earned the reputation as "sin city" for nothing! As the apostle James warned, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder" (2:19). New Orleanians, like the rest of humanity, are not good; as Jesus said, only God is good (Luke 18:19). We all need a Savior.

I believe Harris should consider three other points. First, I would like to say to him that what we have suffered in New Orleans is our own story, not yours. I like the way C.S. Lewis dealt with a similar situation in one of his Chronicles of Narnia books. There was a character who complained to Aslan about the unjust suffering done to someone else. Aslan simply re-

sponded that this suffering the other person experienced was between Him and that person, and had nothing to do with the person bringing the complaint. As a pastor who has served here both before and after Katrina, I can say that through the hardships of Katrina the Lord has taught me much in my life—like trusting in Him to find satisfaction in life and not material things. And many have shared with me that God has brought blessings in their life as they trusted Him in the midst of the tremendous upheaval Katrina brought. This is *our* story, between us and God. It is telling that Harris states later, with bafflement, "... a poll conducted by *The Washington Post* found that 80 percent of Katrina's survivors claim that the event only strengthened their faith in God" (p. 53).

Second, in our church we actually do have a beloved church member who died in the flood waters of Katrina trying to get into the attic. And her daughter, who was with her in that effort to get into the attic, has grown in her faith and in many other ways.

Third, I am puzzled by Harris' assumption that it is impossible to vindicate God's goodness and justice while He permits evil—i.e., arguments on theodicy. I am not puzzled because I don't understand the horror of evil and have never been touched by it. I am not puzzled because I have never been mystified and deeply troubled by evil, such as the Holocaust, that God has allowed to happen in history. Rather, I am puzzled because Harris seems to believe that key biblical figures, such as David, Jesus, Paul, Peter, and John were living in a Pollyanna world and never touched by injustice and evil. The absurdity of this assumption can be seen by scanning Psalm 22, the passion narratives in the gospels, and Acts. These figures were intimately acquainted with evil, knew that we live in a world broken by human sin, and affirmed God's goodness through it all. They (David perhaps in an incipient way) knew that the time for God to bring justice is not limited to one's earthly existence. Our existence is eternal; God's judgment is indeed coming. Jesus' resurrection confirms that good has overcome evil!

As we prepare to recognize the 13th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, may we take on the perspective of the biblical writers. For we serve a God who does "not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him" (Psalm 22:24b) and who promises His followers that one day He will "... wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Yours in Christ,

Woody

Youth Corner

VBS Couldn't Have Done Without You!

Vacation Bible School went great last month, and **our youth had a lot to do with that! Y'all were awesome!** Your help in the Science Room, Games and Rec, Story-telling, as well as the opening and closing of each evening helped all run smoothly and the children learning **about how Jesus rescues us!** This month we'll cool off at Please be sure to invite friends!



Church Family Night

Church Family Night will break for the summer, and will meet back on Wednesday, September 5th with supper from 6:00-7:00 PM. Emily Hingle will be our speaker from 7:00-7:30, and she will share about her summer mission trip to Thailand. Please make plans to come, and bring friends!

Labor Day Celebration

: There will be a Labor Day Celebration gathering in the Fellowship Hall on Monday, September 3rd. This gathering will be from 12:00 Noon to 6:30 PM, and will involve potluck food and a game day. Please see Linda Schirer for more information.

Parenting Class Coming Next Month!

On Tuesday, September 11th Pastor Hingle will **teach a parenting course based on Dr. James Dobson's book and workbook *The New Strong-willed Child*.** This class will meet from 6:30-7:30 PM, with free childcare available.

Back to School Pancake Breakfast!

On Sunday, September 9th we'll enjoy a delicious pancake breakfast to celebrate the beginning of the school year! We'll meet in the Fellowship Hall from 9:00 -10:00 AM, with a brief devotional at 10:00 AM.

Smooth Sailing

VBS Success!

Vacation Bible School was a *wonderful* blessing this year! The theme of “Shipwrecked: Rescued by Jesus” made Jesus real to the children, and they had open hearts to hear the messages each evening. Many children prayed to receive Jesus as the great Rescuer from their sins and as the One to lead them in their lives toward the end of VBS during the storytelling time. Praise God! Many thanks to Mary Ellen Herbert for the excellent, godly leadership she provided as the Director, and also to the *multitude* of volunteers. Kudos to our wonderful youth and adult helpers, as well as the leaders: Yolande Goudeau (Registration); Emily Hingle (Opening/Closing); Wendy Westbook (Arts and Crafts); Brian Westbrook (Games and Rec); and Randy Roberts (Storytelling).

Matters of Hearts and Minds! Returns

This class is required of all interested in the teaching ministry at Lake Vista UMC, and is open to everyone. We will learn The United Methodist Church’s doctrinal standards as well as where the UMC stands on “hot potato” issues. Please let the Church Office know if you can come—and friends are certainly welcome!

Prayer Focus

- ✚ Barbara Velasquez, health
- ✚ The UMC, unity and faithfulness to the Bible and its doctrines
- ✚ Cheryl Strauss’ husband Jim, who is being treated for cancer

Ephesians Sermon Series

Pastor Hingle will continue the sermon series on Ephesians called “Ancient Instructions for the Modern Church”. You are encouraged to read this letter in its entirety—only six chapters!—as we go through this important part of God’s Word. This letter of Paul’s addresses such issues as the church, spiritual gifts, and marriage and family roles.

Finally, a Time for Guys!

We have a new adult Sunday School class which is geared for men! Pastor Woody Hingle is leading this group that meets in the Library at 9:30 AM, and we are currently studying the Gospel of Matthew. All men are invited and encouraged to bring friends!



VBS!

Read your newsletter online at <http://www.LakeVistaUMC.org>

Meetings This Month

PPR Sunday, August 5 after Worship in the Chapel.
Finance Committee Monday August 20 at 6:45 PM in the Parlor.
Church Council Monday, August 20 at 7:30-8:30 PM in the Parlor
Church Clean-up Day Saturday, August 25, 10:00-12:00 Noon

Skeptic's Corner:

This event will return on Friday, August 10th at 12:00 noon and continue our discussion of Paul Copan's *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God*. We will discuss chapter 6 ("God's Timeless Wisdom? Incremental Steps for Hardened Hearts" as well as chapters 7-8, which both address "The Bible's Ubiquitous Weirdness? Kosher Foods, Kooky Laws?" You are invited to join us, regardless of whether you have read the chapters, and bring your lunch (the church will provide the drinks).

Prayer Walk Around the Neighborhood

Prayer Walk—Saturday, August 11th from 10:30-11:30 AM . Please join us for this wonderful ministry!

Small Group Offerings

Wednesday SONrise (6:30-7:30 AM) and Wonderful Wednesday Bible and book study—this month we will be finishing the book study on Rob Renfroe and Walter Fenton's *Are We Really Better Together? An Evangelical Response on the Division in The UMC* (2018), which addresses the issues, such as the final authority of the Bible and homosexuality, that have forced The UMC to have a special General Conference in February, 2019. This book is especially helpful in explaining what is at stake as The UMC seeks to preserve its unity and in understanding the radically different worldview both sides have. The study meets in the Fellowship Hall from 7:00-8:00 PM. All are welcome!

The S(tudy), P(ray), A(ct) Ladies' summer reading book is *Wherever the River Runs* by Kelly Minter. **Kelly's honest** and engaging narrative pulls back the curtain on one of the most captivating places on earth as well as on parts of the gospel we may be able to recite but have never fully believed. Books are on the book table in the Parlor. Suggested donation is \$3.00 each. All women are invited whether you have read the book or not. The first meeting will be Sunday, August 19 at 12:30 PM in the parlor.

Sunday School classes for all ages begin at 9:30 AM on Sunday mornings. Adult classes meet in the Parlor and library. Youth and children meet in the Education Building.

Please call Susan in the office (504-288-2242) if you have any questions about any of the above activities.

A lighthouse for Christ in the heart of the lakefront.

Lake Vista

United Methodist Church

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