

**Soul Talk for the 13th Sunday after Pentecost
August 31, 2017**

August 24, 2017
Rev. Dr. Harlan Gillespie
Conference Superintendent
North Central District – Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church

Spiritual Pilgrimage

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Romans 12:13

The clinical definition of *Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome* is the grief response experienced by someone who experiences and overwhelming and threat to one's life. PTSD is most often associated with war, conflicts, extreme violence.

PTSD is also very real to survivors of both natural and human-caused disasters.

A person, an entire community of a few people or tens/hundreds of thousands of people, massive populations can have a *loss of agency*; that is, a complete loss of control and an ability to have some control over the simplest daily activity.

My hunch is that most people at one time or another experience something in their lives when they lose all sense of *agency* because of overwhelming and uncontrollable events. Many people re-experience the emotions of those moments for years by witnessing others in similar circumstances through the senses of smell, taste, touch, sight, and sound.

I've known of people who have had a re-experiencing of their loss when the words of the Great Thanksgiving are spoken, saying, "Jesus took the bread, *broke* the bread, and gave it to his disciples. . ." In the hearing of the word *broken* they relive their traumatic experience.

The smells, taste, touch, sight, and sounds that may initiate the overwhelming feelings are as unique to each person as there as many people and experiences.

As unique as the emotions and experiences can be, we all share in some connected way the experiences and emotions of overwhelming trauma.

Hurricane Harvey has left its marks of trauma upon hundreds of thousands in very direct ways and upon millions upon millions in less direct ways. And, it will happen again and again.

When Paul wrote to the community of Jesus in Rome, he was writing to a people who had experienced their own traumas from natural disasters (earthquakes, fires, flooding, storms) and human initiated disasters (war, oppression, slavery, persecution).

He went into lengthy theological discourses as well as inspiring words about prayer, hope, and *nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ* (Romans 8).

He included practical admonitions, *love genuinely, hate what is evil*, leaves them with simple instructions: *love genuinely, hating evil, rejoice in hope, patience, perseverance, contribute, extend hospitality even to strangers, bless, rejoice, weep*. All of this in mutual fashion.

When we consider and pray and offer our resources to and with our sisters and brothers of all faiths and walks of life who have been and continue to be in the path of Hurricane Harvey we are contributing to the *needs of the saints and extending hospitality to strangers*.

This is a spiritual pilgrimage at its best and closest walk with Jesus.

This is a spiritual pilgrimage where and when we come face-to-face with God in them, literally and mystically.

This is what our spiritual pilgrimage with Jesus is all about, here and now.

My wife and I do this through the United Methodist Committee on Relief. We invite you to do the same or through other ways you have found to be meaningful.

Contribute to the needs of these saints, and extend hospitality to strangers, for in them and they in us, we have seen God face-to-face.

May you live in the presence of the risen Christ today.

Harlan

Soul Talk is a mostly weekly commentary written for the souls of preachers and other pilgrims and the soul of the church. I always welcome comments on Soul Talk at harlan.gillespie@iaumc.org.