

Editorial: Pretending all is well while the winds howl

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You may have noticed [several articles](#) recently in the news and opinion sections [examining social justice](#) and whether or not it is biblical. Some see social justice as a distraction from the real message and work of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Others see the distraction being in the arguing of the orthodoxy of social justice while we're still sorting out things like #MeToo, #ChurchToo and the evangelical relationship with government.

We will continue to publish articles examining social justice because it is a worthwhile conversation as long as the discussion moves us toward being like Christ.

In the midst of this ongoing discussion of social justice, I joined African-American pastors in Houston this week. I listened to these pastors discuss ways to prepare their congregations and communities for the possibility of a hurricane making landfall again in their city. Their concern is not in the abstract future but in the concrete present. A tropical system is brewing in the Caribbean, and these pastors are discussing emergency plans.

They didn't talk about supplies of food and water or boarding up windows. They didn't talk about evacuation routes. Many of their people don't have the means to evacuate.

They talked about knowing where their people are throughout the storm and aftermath. They talked about having good relationships with their local authorities to speed and smooth communication after a disaster. They talked about saving enough funds to weather a dip in giving as people recover from a hurricane.

And they prayed for those facing Florence with a gravity only those who've been there possess.

Some revelations grab you by the lapels

While churches elsewhere argue about social justice, Houston churches wonder how much rain there will be this time.

That was my revelation, and it led to some tough self-examination.

What a luxury to argue the finer points of social justice. Things must be going really well for a church to have time to debate what Jesus meant by the story of the sheep and the goats or the Good Samaritan.

For those of us in the northern and western part of Texas, hurricane preparedness doesn't factor into our associational meetings or pastor peer group discussions.

Away from the coast, we debate the finer points of theological, political or social positions. We discuss the merits of particular preaching styles. We stumble through Robert's Rules of Order to make motions, discuss motions and vote. We commiserate about the state of our ministries.

In short, so many of us have it so good, a little swirl of clouds doesn't register on our radar.

But for those who have been under feet of water, for those whose people lost homes, for those who lost church property, for those still trying to "get over" Harvey, every little swirl of clouds brings the urgency of their work right back to front and center.

Revelation calls us back to what matters

As I listened to these men and women, as I listened to the seriousness in their voices, as I saw the concern on their faces, I wondered what it must be like to minister in the lead up to landfall. I wondered what it must be like to give time to hurricane preparations that other ministries use for committee meetings.

Churches in Houston, Beaumont and along the coast still talk about social justice, and they should. They still discuss the finer points of theology and the most effective methods for conducting ministry, and they should. But what I heard this week in Houston puts those discussions into perspective.

What I heard, in essence, was, “We can’t pretend all is well while the winds howl. We have to be ready to be the people of God in a tough place, a place where we ourselves are suffering. We have to be ready to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ right through the storm because we don’t know how much rain will fall this time. We don’t know if this will be our last opportunity.”

People of God, the winds are howling. Make your discussions count for what really matters—communicating and embodying the gospel of Jesus Christ in a world afraid of landfall.

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