

God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
Though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.

Psalm 46:1-3

September 5, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The tropical storm that came through the Northeast last Sunday gave the Valley an unprecedented amount of water. We appreciate history, but we don't always like making it. Still, we offer a most hearty thanks to our Lord for His protection and care this past week; most important being that everyone here was spared. It is always in history that God reveals His character, and we have seen it on display this past week!

It is truly incredible to experience what water can do given the chance. It is a firsthand reminder that no matter what we do we will always be limited to our places in Creation. It is also just as amazing to see neighbors helping each other- some don't even like each other. Middleburgh and the surrounding communities quickly rallied to help the needs and began to clean out houses and businesses. People have been incredibly generous with their time and resources to help put houses and businesses back together.

Yet, we still mourn the loss of homes, livelihoods and possessions. Our work and homes are extensions of ourselves. When these things are taken from us in the manner that they were, we experience loss. In the past week emotions have ranged from: shock and disbelief, frustration and anger, to resignation and exhaustion. We'll feel these again in the coming weeks and months. The flood has personally affected each of us. But those in our own congregation that have been directly effected we lift up in prayer. Communities up and down the Schoharie Creek are not doing well. Schoharie, Breakabeen, Blenheim, and Prattsville are needing more help. My hope is that that in the coming weeks and months we may be able to offer it. Pray about what we can do.

Naturally, our church building took on water even despite our best planning. But by God's providence, the Consistory made the wise decision of installing the flood doors and saved it from more damage. (It was good that I was on vacation- I would have been reluctant to cancel worship for some rain). Another mercy is that a few months ago we substantially increased our flood insurance coverage. We will be using all of our insurance coverage, and then some, to clean and restore our buildings. Again, the Lord knew what we needed.

The Consistory decided to contract with a professional disaster recovery service. Quick Response began cleaning Sunday morning. They will clean and stabilize the sanctuary, foyer and fellowship hall. The plan is to repair the foyer and fellowship hall first so that we can return to them as soon as possible. The sanctuary has a lot more work to be done and this will take time. We don't know how long. It depends on what needs to be done, our resources, and how we want to finish it. In the coming weeks we will get a picture of how this will go and what we will need.

Until we return to our building, **we will be worshipping at the Methodist church at 9:30 am.** This Sunday, the 11th, there will also be a ecumenical worship service at the Methodist church. I've been told that it will be a memorial service for the terrorist attacks 10 years ago as well as our recent flood.

Communication, like in marriage, will be important to maintain the bond of love that we enjoy. Count on decisions being made that you don't like. Extend grace to everyone. Speak the truth in love. Pray for them and try to see them as God sees them; how God sees you. We are a bunch of sinners saved by grace, being molded after the likeness of Christ. This takes time. Things are a mess. But this is our story of salvation.

If you have any questions, please ask either a Consistory member or myself. Brain DeFeo and Stan Roesler are co-chairs of the Property Committee and have been doing an incredible job of gathering information and working out the endless details. The church office number (827-5134) has been forwarded to my cell phone (860-7404). My home number (though not working at the moment) is 827-8785. email: jeffa.kelley@gmail.com.

The most important thing you can do for your own health is to pray. Be honest with God. Read the Psalms- they were often in a heap of trouble too. And pray for your neighbor. Things are raw for people. Ask how people are doing and be prepared just to listen. And then give them God's blessing. And don't be afraid to speak it; it's not up to you. It is God who does the blessing.

Pardon the length of the letter. I didn't get to preach this week. If you need anything, even just to have coffee and chat, please don't hesitate to call.

In Him,

Jeff