

God in the hurricane: A confession of faith

by [Samuel Wells](#) in the [October 4, 2005](#) issue

The writers of great hymns were deeply aware of the relationship between God and the forces of nature. “Time, like an ever rolling stream,/Rolls all its sons away.” The rolling stream has certainly rolled a few good sons away this week. “Our shelter from the stormy blast/And our eternal home.” There hasn’t been much shelter to be had from the stormy blast this week, and rather a lot of people have been looking for an eternal home, having been swept away from their earthly one. As Christians we are bound to ask, “Where is God in Hurricane Katrina?”

In a few moments we shall stand to say the words “We believe in God, the Father Almighty.” If we truly believe God is almighty, well may we come to him in horror at this catastrophe in his created order, well may we rail against him for the many injustices of the story—the loss of life, the punishment of the poor, the devastation of livelihoods. Well may we pray to him for mercy for the survivors, succor for the devastated, strength for the rescuers. Deep may we ponder the mystery of his creative purpose, the beauty of wind and wave and yet the ghastliness of hurricane and flood. Anxiously may we fear his anger against those who reject his grace and mercy, those who harden their hearts against the destitute, exploit the desperate and withhold the abundance of his good gifts from those in plight and scarcity.

But let not that be all we say about the story of God. Let us remember when we wonder why God doesn’t do something that he has already done something. He has given us good ways to live, and has countless times sought to persuade us to follow these good ways, whether by rescue or warning or example or threat. This is what the Old Testament is all about. He has come among us himself, and by word and wonder and purpose and parable he has offered us the gift of life through friendship with him. This is the story of the New Testament.

Of all the catastrophes of the world, one stands alone, and that is the catastrophe that we rejected God’s loving offer in Jesus. He died a terrible death. However low we go, even to the Superdome itself, we need never look up to Jesus—only sideways: he went that low too. All God’s anger against human depravity—and we have seen plenty of depravity this week, in many aspects of this tragedy—all God’s

anger was experienced by Jesus on the cross. But most important, death was overcome. The horror of nature, its death and destruction, does not have the final word. Easter has the final word. So let's never ask, How can God do nothing? for God has already done everything. The one thing he hasn't done is obliterate us. He did that to Jesus instead.

After the resurrection God sent his Holy Spirit to transform and empower his people, to turn sorrow into dancing and waste places into springs of joy. And we have seen the Holy Spirit this week. We have seen glimpses of remarkable goodness, sacrificial selflessness, disarming generosity. There is no room on my boat: I shall swim so you can step on board. There is no more food: you can have mine. You have lost everything: everything that is mine is yours to share. You have no home: my home is your home. So again let not our ponderings about God's goodness or our anxieties about his power blind us to the activity of his Spirit. God is anguished, but he is alive, and he is active.

The heart of Christian faith is the mystery of the Holy Trinity. And the heart of Christian faith today, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, is to believe not just in the apparently removed creator God, not just in the deeply co-suffering Son of God, and not just in the empowering and surprising Spirit of God, but in all three. God is not a buffet meal, from which we take just the bits our appetite and our waistline incline us to choose. The heart of Christian faith is to take the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit together and believe that they are one God, and that in creation there was already the suffering and empowering at work, and that on the cross there was the deep mystery of the Father and the profound subversion of the Spirit likewise at work. So if the story of the hurricane and flood is a story about God, our response is first of all to pray, and second to say humbly but thoughtfully, "We believe in one God."