



*What deeper reflection are we called to in our time? Why?*

## Waiting for the storm

By Mary Minette, ELCA director for environmental education and advocacy

*“Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.” - Mark 13:33*

Jesus tells us that we should always be prepared for the coming of the kingdom of God. Christ uses a parable of a man leaving his servants in charge of his house while he’s away on a journey and telling them to be alert for his return at any time. I thought of that need for constant preparedness this weekend, as I, along with most of the people living along the northeastern coast of the U.S., prepared and waited for a massive storm to hit my community. The storm, a combination of a late season hurricane named Sandy that blew up the Atlantic coast and another storm racing across the country, created a large system of low pressure with high winds and heavy rains. All of this struck the eastern seaboard just as a full moon brought the highest tides of the month to our beaches, causing widespread flooding.

The damage caused by Sandy has yet to be assessed, but will undoubtedly be in the billions of dollars — in flooding and tree damage, in food thrown out because of lost power, in lost economic productivity and sales — everything from the New York Stock Exchange to the federal government to public transportation systems, stores, restaurants and schools has been shut down in cities around the region for days. Power companies were prepared, as were emergency responders, for days of work to restore power and help communities get back on their feet.

But was this just an isolated incident, a rare “perfect storm”? Just something to prepare for in the hours before the storm hit, to clean up after, and to put behind us as we go back to our normal lives with

no thought as to what might come next?

Unfortunately this storm may instead be a glimpse of our future, along with the extended drought that hit the Midwestern states this summer, the derecho (widespread windstorm) that slammed across the country last June, and the wildfires this year in several Western states. Warming global temperatures are affecting our weather, making rainstorms more violent, droughts more devastating, floods and fires more frequent. Sandy was fueled by [warm ocean temperatures](#)—made warmer by climate change — and coastal flooding was made worse by rising oceans, [also linked to climate change](#). In other words, it was an unusual storm, made worse by climate change.

Sandy and the other “extreme” weather events of this year have shown us that short term preparation and post-disaster response are important. But they can also teach us something even more critical: that we must be even better prepared to make our communities more resilient and more able to withstand weather extremes. And preparation includes prevention, undertaking the hard and necessary work to prevent climate change from growing worse and making weather disasters even more frequent and even more damaging and deadly.

Sandy shows us that climate change is our new reality: some of the impacts of a warming world are with us now, and will be with our children and their children. But we have the time, and the means, to prevent extreme weather from becoming commonplace and to make our communities more resilient to the storms and droughts and fires to come. What can we do? We can reduce our use of the fossil fuels that are fueling climate change by weatherizing our houses, buying energy-efficient products, driving more fuel-efficient cars (and driving less), and by generally buying less stuff that requires energy to make, store and ship. If each of us worked to be more conscious of the energy we use, and took basic steps to reduce our energy use, it would move us in the right direction.

But each of us acting alone can't make the major changes needed to prevent the worst impacts of climate change from occurring and from haunting our future. We need strong, decisive, collective action and leadership from our officials, and from officials around the globe: leadership we are not currently getting from either of our presidential candidates, nor from our Congress, nor from most of our state or local government officials. We need leadership from institutions of all sizes and shapes, and we need leadership from local, national and global businesses. To prevent the most extreme impacts of climate change from becoming reality, each of us needs to take ownership and act, before this problem intensifies and all

we're able to do is wait and prepare for the worst.

The road to prevention and resilience is difficult, but we have the means to navigate it. So why do we continue to wait for disaster and refuse to take the steps to really prepare for and prevent it?

**A prayer for the journey**

*Steadfast God of hope, protect us when storms, floods and fires rage through our communities. Grant us the wisdom and vision to do what is needed to prevent disaster and to build a more resilient and hopeful world for ourselves, for our neighbors, and for all creation. Amen*

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