

Water and Fire:

Life in the Balance

Rev. Patrick Stephens

*Third Week of Lent
Wednesday March 23*

Scripture

1 Kings 19:11b-13b

Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice

Reflection

Most people have some experience with trauma and loss. Each person's life is marked by the experiences that we have lived through and witnessed. We have such abundant access to images, stories, and in-depth coverage of tragic events in our own region, and around the world. It is almost routine to be exposed to human suffering every time we access news media.

We cannot always know how we will be affected by the situations we witness. Sometimes I am surprised by my own response to the news of a troubling event or tragic occurrence. It is important to ask for help in dealing with the strong feelings that come with witnessing suffering.

While news coverage of major tragedies comes and goes so quickly, there are some constants in the stories of human tragedy. As the commotion of the camera crews and reporters subsides, the quiet work of neighbourly care and solidarity gets underway. Almost universal to the experience of destruction is the human will to rebuild and offer care to those in need. Another constant, not unrelated to that of neighbourly care is that of God's loving presence. At all times, in the midst of every tragic situation, God is always with us, offering the quiet but timeless invitation to reach out in love.

Prayer

*Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake.
Augustine of Hippo, fourth century*

Dealing with post-wildfire stress

PWRDF previously reported on the important work the Stemetewu'w'I Friendship Centre has done for the 100 Mile House community in the wake of the 2017 wildfires. The centre is working with PWRDF again to help with suicide prevention. The area is at risk due to the high Indigenous population and added stresses following the wildfires.

Recognizing the increased risk of suicide, PWRDF provided two Anglican Churches — St. Peter's Williams Lake and St. Timothy's 100 Mile House — with \$5,000 each to provide suicide prevention training in their communities. The Rev. Dr. Keith Dobyns and The Rev. Kristen Dobyns are implementing the project.

“Our goal was for each church to host one ASIST course, and then follow-up with several Safe Talk events in each community,” said the Dobyns. “We especially sought individuals who could respond to the increased suicide risk of Indigenous peoples and of middle-aged and older men. We sought to time the ASIST courses for mid-winter, when we understood that suicidality was highest.”

ASIST is a two-day course that educates community leaders and those in helping professions. Safe Talk events are for the entire community and focus on recognizing the signs and risks associated with suicide and provide training on how to refer at risk individuals through the right channels to receive help.

The ASIST course took place in February 2018 and despite a heavy snow and ice storm, nearly 20 people made their way to St. Peter's. Fifteen participants were in helping professions, five were Indigenous and three were clergy. The St. Timothy's ASIST course had 12 participants, despite bad weather and scheduling conflicts. However, the course evaluations for both churches received scores of good to excellent.

The project partnered with the 100 Mile House office of the Canadian Mental Health Association who recruited the course facilitators. The Safe Talk courses will take place this October and November in the communities. After feedback from the community, the recruitment for the courses will expand to include other members of the community.

Read the whole story on our website at

<https://pwrdf.org/suicide-prevention-programs-designedfor-post-wildfire-stress/>