

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Hurricane bluster. Having moved here over eight years ago from Southern California, one of the first things I learned about the Miami area is that hurricanes are a big deal. They carry a gravitas that would be the envy of any aspiring politician or CEO.

To the point: they pose a serious danger. Disaster preparedness is a major plank in the platform of any institution or community. It has to be because—hey, remember Andrew? And more recently, of course, there was Wilma which, to my knowledge, was the most menacing of all hurricanes in the Miami Lakes area.

As I muse over these words, it’s the Saturday before Ike. I’m less worried today than yesterday about Ike because the forecasting models suggest a more westward route—enough to make the impact here more tropical storm like. But still, we never know. Ike could take a more sudden turn to the north than predicted and hammer us with category-four clout by Tuesday of next week.

That’s the thing about hurricanes: their capricious unpredictability. Again, we never know. They’re like a wake-up call, a humbling reminder that there is a whole *other* world out there called *mother nature*; and when she chooses, there’s a daunting rumble to her roar.

When I think back to the tsunami that devastated Southeast Asia a few years back, I am still in utter awe of the magnitude. Twenty-foot waves! Are you kidding me?

Are we listening? Certainly, one of the positive features of hurricanes is how they teach us to listen. Being good listeners is not always one of our more evolved virtues. In *listening* to the hard data on hurricanes, we’re reminded that there are some things we need to take seriously; and that details matter.

For Christians—every year—in the early days of Advent, there’s an emphasis on *the signs of the times*. And the trumpet sounds the theme of *watchfulness* and how we don’t know the day or the hour (for the possible coming of the Son of Man). Then we march out images of John the Baptist proclaiming *Prepare the way of the Lord* in the wild. And, as we come together, the spirit of the season invites us to be good listeners.

There are, indeed, things to be taken seriously. Are we listening? To the mood of the community and nation? To the calls from the underside for change and a more hopeful future? To the cries from underneath for health care, more equitable education, and more opportunity to provide for our families.

The rumblings from Ike awaken us from our slumber; and we remember. It’s time to get prepared. Time to do what we need to do to brace ourselves for the very real danger tomorrow poses.

Prioritized thinking. It's compelling how hurricanes prompt us all into more prioritized thinking. When the word goes out and the repetitive news beat from television and the internet back it up, we move into action. Right away, we set our priorities, as well we should.

But the larger point is that prioritized thinking is a useful skill for all realms of life. When we are forced to set our priorities—in anything—it helps us sort out who we are and what we are doing.

Fill the gas tank, buy the water, the food, the batteries—whatever it is. Rev up the generator, put away the patio furniture, fill the tub with water and—lest we forget—put up the hurricane shutters.

Priorities help us order our lives in ways that enable us to be more successful. They help us realize how we want to feel five years from now while, at the same time, encouraging us to do the actions today that move our lives towards that end.

Don't each of us have to ask ourselves everyday: what do I need to do today so I can be the person (spouse, parent, employee etc.) I want to be in the days of tomorrow?

The truth of our lives is that the details matter. Setting priorities matter. Are we listening?

By the time this issue of the Laker hits the community, Ike most likely will have gone off to stir preparations somewhere in the gulf. Still, we never know. Tomorrow, it could be Karl or Loretta or Martin.