



**“NO CASUALTIES”**  
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**ST. ANDREW’S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
**SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS**  
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**Acts 4:32-35**

There was not a needy person among them. You all know we just got back from Louisiana, our second mission trip back to Lake Charles. This was a little bit different trip than the first one. Fred was there to attest to it. The first trip we noticed of just the massive amounts of destruction that a hurricane can do in Lake Charles. Trees that were two and three hundred years old with trunks that I couldn't even begin to get my arms half way around were uprooted and laying over on their sides with root balls that would be twenty and thirty feet round. Some of them would land on houses many of them did, torn up yards, laying across streets and power lines down. Trees everywhere blown over and this was in Lake Charles. Lake Charles is the county seat of Calcasieu Parish. In Louisiana they call counties parishes. The parish that is just south of Calcasieu Parish, just south of Lake Charles is Cameron Parish. For those of you all who went to see our slide show last October when we came back you heard the story, but we decided to drive down through Cameron Parish again just to see what had been done in the last five months. Cameron Parish, after the hurricane, was devastated. It was 100 percent loss. Insurance companies came in with cases of spray paint and once they would file the claim on the house they would spray paint on the house the name of the insurance company, the owner of the house and a number. So every house down there had a spray paint on it. It wasn't the kind of graffiti that you would find in the inner city up north. It was disheartening. On those houses that weren't there any more there was just a concrete slab where the house used to be, they stuck a sign up and spray painted the name, the insurance company and a number.

Trash and debris was strewn for miles, just everywhere. And trying to think about the awesome task of beginning to clean up the area, of gathering up that trash, that debris, that... it's not trash, those were those people's homes. Pictures and knick-knacks and plates and dishes and pots and pans and cabinet doors and drawers and refrigerators and air conditioners and walls and windows and doors and everything from the houses that were completely obliterated over miles of swamp.

This time around we went back and what we noticed is that there weren't as many trees laying over, a lot of the brush had been cleaned up. There weren't near as many blue tarps that were familiar from FEMA. FEMA had gone in and tarped up every body's house that had some shingle damage or roof damage or leaks. There wasn't nearly as many of those. They were still there. Some of them had been shredded from the wind and the weather over five months of winter, but there were an awful lot of new roofs, new shingles and roofing companies everywhere. We went to Lowe's quite a bit. We made a daily trip if not two or three to buy supplies for the work that we were doing and they would drop-load pallets of sheetrock and shingles and roofing nails and just everywhere, all over the store, out in the front. It has changed quite a bit and yet it's still chaotic. It's just a little bit more organized now. The piles are a little bit more organized. They've moved the rubbish around, moved the debris around, and organized it better. Last October there were trucks from just about every state in the union, big utility trucks trying to set up utility lines again. There were very few of them that we saw this time. Things are starting to turn around, but that's only the physical stuff.

We sat at a table the last night we were there on Thursday night. When we were there in October, we were a part of the very first wave of folks who came down to Lake Charles to help out, our church sent one of the first teams, there were four teams there total, three teams with ours, and the church there began a tradition that week that they didn't know they were going to continue to do

but they managed to do. They serve gumbo. They fixed a meal for every one of the volunteers who has ever come there. For the last five months they have been fixing a meal once a week for every group that comes there. That's their way of saying "thank-you" they being the church, Oak Park United Methodist Church. The pastor there asked us what we wanted for supper because he said you've got to tell us when you want your gumbo because we're going to fix it for you and a couple of us went, well a couple of our group went, umm, gumbo, umm oh we could probably put up with some gumbo. The rest of us just started kind of drooling a little bit because we know how good gumbo is.

But we sat around the table and we had finished eating our gumbo and we were chatting with another pastor, Pastor Simon Chigameera, he's from Zimbabwe. He is a graduate, by the way, of Africa University. You need to know that. He and his wife both were graduates of Africa University, the first United Methodist University in the Continent of Africa and they were graduates also of Candler School of Theology in Atlanta. Both of them are seeking ordination in the United Methodist Church. But Pastor Simon, that's what he likes to be called, because nobody can really pronounce his last name and it's not spelled the way it sounds. Pastor Simon said some things that got us all to thinking very reflective thoughts. He said there is something about a hurricane that removes all of the barriers that may have been there before. He said you may have been rich or poor, you may have been white or black, you may have Cajon or.... but all of those distinguishing things after the hurricane disappeared. And then he said something that was extremely peculiar to me and I began to really digest this for a long time, it was either that or the gumbo, but he was trying to share with us the casualties of the hurricane are not those casualties that you read about in the paper or hear on CNN. The casualties of the hurricane, even this morning they were talking about Katrina victims and children who were separated from their parents coming back together after so many months, but he said there are different casualties that you don't really read about or hear about in the press. The casualties he was talking about were the casualties of depression. For folks whose whole lives have been turned upside down and inside out and they've lost their home, they've lost everything they own.

Catherine was even saying, Catherine was a lady who helped to serve that meal, she's a lady across the street from the church, a member of a different church, but was there nonetheless to help. Catherine said that when she got ready to leave town she packed four days of clothes. She said we left on Thursday. She said I had Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday's clothes and I was going to be home by Monday. She said two weeks later we finally got home. Can you imagine those folks in Cameron Parish in which there were no houses left inhabitable? They left with four days worth of stuff and that's their entire world's possessions. That's all they have left, whatever they could throw in a suitcase and put in their car. She said it changed everything. Pastor Simon said it changed everything because not only did it level the playing field, but it made us all even and equal and he said there were things that began to take shape that weren't there before. Suddenly the people in the congregation of Warren United Methodist Church and of Oak Park United Methodist Church began to recognize, hey wait a minute, what happened to.... they're not here and they began to call on them and they began to work with them and help them.

George and I went to a clergy training event up here for the Katrina victims to teach us once again how to be chaplains for those folks who are going through such a devastating ordeal. One of the things they taught us repeatedly is "Listen, just listen, don't offer answers or solutions or ... just listen," because they have to work through their story and they've got to tell it and sometimes they have to tell it again and sometimes again and sometimes again and it may be ten or twelve or fifteen times that they tell their story and as they tell their story it finally begins to make sense to them. Don't try to fix them. Let them work through it but they've got to have someone to tell that story to.

Catherine told us her story and I tell you it was scary to listen to her tell the story about how she stopped at least four or five or six times before she could actually find a place to stay. It was in Arkansas as a matter of fact before she could find a place to stay.

But Pastor Simon was talking about the church and how the church literally began to be the church. Jan wasn't too far off with her children's sermon this morning. When you talk about the people in the church going out and serving after worship. We messed that up somehow. We call it a worship service, but it's really not. Those are two different concepts. They're both verbs, well sort of. Worship and serve are both verbs and we've combined them together to call what we do in this hour a worship service, but it's not really. It's coming together to worship and then going out to serve afterwards and that's what Pastor Simon was talking about and he said you know the early church began to care for each and everyone of them around them. So and so may have been persecuted, so and so may have lost their child to the Roman soldiers in the early church, such and such may have lost their spouse to those who were persecuting the early church, namely the Synagogue and the Temple, those who were trying to put down the way because it was making too much noise and it was drawing too much attention and Rome was going to crack down on them so they figured they would take care of it first. But the early church began to minister to those families and began to talk to them about their ordeal and to listen.

The unsung problems of a hurricane, the disaster that really strikes, the casualties that come from a hurricane aren't the ones that show up in body bags. Those are tragic enough. The real casualties that come about in a hurricane are the casualties of those who are left behind who are going through great depression. Pastor Simon said the one statistic that will never be mentioned is the number of suicides that will happen because of this hurricane and he said that's where we've been trying to work as a church to prevent those.

Well that's four hundred miles away. That's well out of range of any of the windstorms that we got. We don't need to worry about that. Only five of us that went, oh by the way you need to know that our average age in our work team went up by nine years, our average age was 70, you need to know that. But all that stuff happened over there, it's not that important here, it's too removed, it's too remote, it's too far away for us to even worry about, right? No it's not, because when the church begins to be the church, when we really are the church no one falls through the cracks, no one gets left behind, no one ever, ever becomes a casualty of life. Families take care of families and friends, brothers and sisters in Christ take care of each other. Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimonies to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all and there was not a needy person among them. Oh it's easy to talk about you know needing houses and needing roofs and needing sheet-rocking and needing ceilings repaired. That's not what we're talking about here. There 's something deeper than that. Oh, those are important, don't get me wrong. There are people who are desperately in need of a house. George mentioned the folks here under the bridge. Guess what? They need help, too. But there's something deeper than that in the church. When we are the church no one is a casualty, no one, no one, everyone counts. It may have been over there but it's here, too. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!