

WCA February 2025 Aaron and Hur Prayer Guide

by Rev. John LaRusch

Theme: His Steadfast Love Endures Forever



In the Fall of this past year, Hurricane Helene struck the southeastern coast of the US hard. It left in its wake a 500-mile path of death and destruction (like that of hurricane Camille in 1969) as it made its way across the panhandle of Florida and up the Appalachian Mountains before it wore itself out falling apart over Tennessee and Kentucky. Hurricane Milton soon followed. Milton brought less destruction because it crossed the middle of Florida, moving west to east heading out across the Atlantic. As a result of

these two storms, thousands of homes, businesses, schools, and churches were either damaged or destroyed. The aftermath of both storms still lingers. It will take years to rebuild lives and property. The clean-up crews with all their expertise and resources are still out and about diligently doing their best to restore people's way of life.

People wondered then and still wonder now, "Where do we begin? What do we do? How do we clean up this mess?" The King of kings – Jesus is his name – heard their cry of distress and rallied his faithful troops around his flag and sent them forth to do what they have always done. The faithful began with prayer. Then they went to work. Doing their best. Preparing for the things that would come and interfere with their progress to help make right what was made wrong for those caught in the storms and its continuing aftermath. The faithful have and will continue to trust God to bring victory. Hope will eventually return to most of the people, bringing with it a new sense of peace and joy. And the faithful will once again sing songs of praise and thanksgiving to our Father above remembering that God's steadfast love endures forever.

From December 2019 till sometime after mid-2022, the COVID pandemic struck the world like an earthquake. Shaking everything apart. Governments fell into disarray and dysfunction. Civilization ground to a halt. It struck with such a force that the ensuing tsunami killed millions of people around the globe. The physical, mental, and emotional destruction that followed in its path resulted in the death of our perceived way of life. Businesses closed, and some vanished without a trace. Churches closed, and many never reopened. Like that of a physical storm, relationships were severed and many lost forever. The remnants of the pandemic still linger all around the world, but time and much hard work has slowly brought about a means to re-establish a connection with our memories, helping us to navigate from what was normal to what our new reality is. Clean-up crews with all of their expertise and resources are still out and about diligently doing their best to restore people's way of life.

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In the Spring of 2016, in Kansas, the UMC General Conference was struck by three disasters simultaneously – a quake that was felt around the world, a storm that tore the very fabric of the church apart at its seams, and a spiritual pandemic that infected the minds and hearts of many. Tension had steadily built up around the issues of the authority of scripture and doctrinal integrity for decades. Kansas became ground zero. The magnitude of the tectonic pressures released generated a tsunami that, in its passing, left the church in ruin. The storm literally ripped the fabric of the UMC in two. It became obvious that remaining in each other's company would only promote more sorrow and grief. The smell of division and separation had permeated the air. A pandemic spread through the word of Methodism infecting the hearts, minds, and spirits of many. The hopes of remaining a united people vanished. The UMC had polarized. Two distinct opposing factions had emerged from the devastation. One liberal (aka, progressive). One conservative (aka, traditional). The outcome of these tragedies has severed relationships. Many forever. Clean-up crews from both sides with all of their expertise and resources are still out and about doing what they perceive is their best to restore people's way of life. Both parties had chosen a path to follow that they believed would make right what had been made wrong regarding their interpretations of the authority of scripture and doctrinal integrity.

People wondered then and still wonder now, "Where do we begin? What do we do? How do we clean up this mess we find ourselves in?" The King of kings – Jesus in his name – heard their cry of distress and rallied his faithful troops around his flag and sent them forth to do what they have always done. The faithful began with prayer. Then they went to work. Doing their best. Preparing for the things that would come and interfere with their progress to help make right what was made wrong for those caught in our man-made cataclysmic event and its continuing aftermath. The faithful have and will continue to trust God to bring victory. Hope will eventually return to most of the people, bringing with it a new sense of peace and joy. And the faithful will once again sing songs of praise and thanksgiving to our Father above remembering that God's steadfast love endures forever.

When I was asked to consider writing this prayer guide, I did not hesitate to say "Yes!" At that moment, I knew the Spirit was directing me to look to the Psalms for guidance. My call to the ministry has led me in many directions both in and out of the church. And one gift of the Spirit – the gift of healing exercised through preaching, teaching, counseling, and coaching – has dominated all that I have done in the name of Jesus. Psalm 107 is a healer's song. One that invokes compassion, love for others, and gratitude in a healer's heart and soul. Those who take up the call to intercede on behalf of others are healers. So, join me this month as we sing and pray through Psalm 107. "Why?" you may ask. Because there is still a lot of work to be done. The church and the world around us still needs healing.

Marching forward into this new year, let us also remember that while we who have joined the Global Methodist Church (GMC) have much to be thankful for, there are still those Methodists in our communities, in our country, and around the world, who don't. As we pray this month, as we focus on what we are called to pray for, let us remember these things: Some Methodists both in-and-out of the UMC are still living in distress. Some of our brothers and sisters in Christ are wandering aimlessly in a season of wilderness. Stranded without sound spiritual leadership to guide them through the waste land.

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Some now live under the shadow of death for they chose to do nothing. Some have been devoured by their own folly. And some ignored our Father's warnings that "something wicked" lurks on the horizon that will leave them in ruin. Preferring instead to do business as usual.

Let's pray. Lord, "let the words from [our] mouth[s], and the meditations of [our] heart[s], be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, [our] strength, [our] redeemer." (Ps. 19:14) May our prayers reflect your steadfast love that endures forever. Not just for some, but for *all* your people. Amen.

Turn with me now to #107 ("Let the Redeemed of the Lord Say So") in our hymnal, the Psalms. Let this song be our ode, our ballad, our story as we praise him with thanksgiving for his "wonderful works [lavished] on the children of men." Please note that this psalm begins with a celebratory prayer of thanksgiving (vv. 1-3) sung by those who have safely returned to Jerusalem [a new city to dwell in], and that the concluding verses (33-42) testify how God vindicates himself through reversals to display His own righteousness. Verses 4-32 [four flashback stories of what life was like living in exile] will be our focal point where we will spend our time kneeling before the Throne of God.

Week one: Ps 107:4-9 "Those Who Wandered in Barren Places"

Unlocking the mystery:

We begin our reading this week with three conundrums. First, what does the word "some" mean? The word "some" represents a full range of values for measuring something. It is defined as the relative size of something which in this case is quantity [or number] of people. So how many people is the psalmist referring to? A few or many? A minority or the majority? Or an unspecified number in between? What we do know for certain is that the word "some" referred to in this psalm is more than one and less than all. Second, what does "Desert waste" mean? It means (1) a tract of land which lies beyond cultivated ground in the immediate neighborhood of the towns and villages, and (2) a barren, uninhabited and desolate place of testing and trial, a season of wilderness. James wrote, "Anyone who meets a testing challenge head-on and manages to stick it out is mighty fortunate. For such persons loyally in love with God, the reward is life and more life." (v 1:12, MSG) And third, when was this psalm written? Was the psalmist one of the returning exiles? Or was this song handed down to him by word of mouth for generations? Personally, I prefer to lean towards believing this psalm is a first-hand account of what life was like during captivity (vv. 4-32), after their return home to Jerusalem (vv. 1-3), and of the first of many "jubilee" celebrations that followed. Our journey through Psalm 107 will focus on what took place in the lives of the exiles as they sojourned home. (vs. 4-32.)

The first group that we encounter are the "Some [who] wandered in desert waste." I can personally identify with these people. I (and thousands of other ex-UMC members) have become very familiar with what it is like to wander in desert waste. In my self-imposed exile, I have been meandering in desert waste for several years outside the camp unable to find a way in. I officially broke all ties with the UMC sometime in early Fall of 2020. The church my wife and I had attended for decades had been "taken over" by those in sympathy with the liberal, progressive, and woke movement in the UMC. We knew of a much smaller UM church close to home that had remained traditional in all aspects of our faith. A country church considered to be of no importance (other than the value of its location) by the

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denomination. We moved our membership over to it hoping to escape the calamity that was tearing our denomination apart.

One Sunday morning, the pastor looked down from the pulpit, called me by name, and said, “John, I’m retiring, again. Take care of these people. I’ll notify the DS that I am leaving. She will send someone to fill the pulpit.” Immediately, without hesitation, I pledged that I would. Two weeks later, I assumed responsibility to lead worship out of necessity because the DS had not sent pulpit supply. I continued to do so for two years. During those two years, the members debated whether to separate from the UMC. On October 8, 2022, most members of the church decided to remain with the UMC. My wife and I left. We have been wandering ever since. We have found a non-denominational church in our neighborhood to “temporarily” harbor in. But they, too, reject traditional, orthodox doctrine and discipline. At least they are not outright liberal, progressive, or woke. We miss home. We are still seeking a new city to dwell in.

These last two plus years have been a time of testing and trial in what is for us barren landscape. Initially, there were several other Methodists interested in planting a future GM church in our community. We banded together. Over time, one by one, my brothers and sisters parted company. What happened? I believe they were overwhelmed by the amount of time, energy, and expense associated with birthing a new church. Someday, there will be a new GM church firmly planted in our community. It already has a name – Sojourn. Initial funds necessary to start a church have been donated and are now being held in trust by the Mid-South Conference of the GMC till the seed is planted. When the Spirit reveals to me those who have the same like-minded desire to worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly; Sojourn will be born. The day will come when my wife and I will gather in fellowship to celebrate with other Methodists giving thanks that God’s steadfast love endures forever. Someday we will sing in concert in “the congregation of the people” as we lift up our voices thanking the Lord “for his wondrous works to the children of man.”

The plain truth:

The UMC is hurting. I do not believe they would ever admit it, but they are suffering as a result of the decades-long skirmish that grew into a full-fledged war. It has knocked the wind out of their sails. They are stunned by the ferocity of the reactionary storm that caught them by surprise. Now they have a new problem to contend with. For not everyone who remains connected to the UMC embraces the new interpretation of the authority of scripture and doctrine. Many of our former brothers and sisters have awakened to the fact that they now live in a foreign land filled with a submarginal existence – a desert waste. One absent of meaning or value. One that has left people hungry and thirsty for the Lord’s love.

The aftermath of the quaking storm that struck the UMC has driven them to respond to their new crisis by recommending that all who are dissatisfied with the direction the church has chosen to take should leave. And they are. The “some” now cry out in despair. They are asking, “Where do we go? What do we do? We are Methodists without a home. How do we clean up this mess we find ourselves in?” Paralysis has overcome many of them. Pinning them in place. They are afraid to move forward or backward to the left or the right. They are hungry and thirsty for the true word of God. Their souls have

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fainted. They ask, “Who will come and guide us to a new city to dwell in?” They need our help. It is on behalf of these people, this “some,” that we pray for this week.

Lord, hear our prayers:

Father, do not let our ears grow deaf to your people’s cry. Place a burden upon our hearts for those who are now contemplating leaving the UMC. Many of our brothers and sisters have accepted the UMC’s advice to leave. But unlike the exiles in our psalm with whom you had provided provisions for the trip home, this second wave of exiles will leave with nothing more than the clothes on their backs, with their pockets empty, and with troubled spirits. Now your people face what they believe is going to be for them a wilderness journey of mega proportions. Afraid of what lies before them as they march deeper into the unknown. Hungry and thirsty. Wondering where their next meal and drink will come from. Remind them, Lord, they are never alone. That Jesus is always present with them. Father, we know that the evil one feeds on those overcome with fear. We pray you will shield them from the wolves around them who will do their best to devour them. Send us [your clean-up crew] back into the desert waste to help make right what was made wrong for those caught up in the rebellious upheaval that has disrupted your church and thrown it into chaos. As always, may prayer be our banner leading us forward into battle as we work together preparing for the things that will come and interfere with our progress. We will trust you and you alone to bring victory. We pray hope will soon return to your people, bringing with it a new sense of peace and joy. And that the faithful will once again gather around your flag to sing songs of praise and thanksgiving to our Father above remembering that his steadfast love endures forever. Amen.

Week two: Ps 107:10-16 “Those who sat in Darkness”

Unlocking the mystery:

As we turn our thoughts over to the second group in our caravan, we encounter another conundrum. What does the word “prisoners” mean? Some bibles read “prisoners” and others read “bound [a captive]” in v. 10. Both imply the people spoken of are not free. However, it is not clear in the text if their imprisonment is literal (i.e., physical) or metaphorical (i.e., spiritual). Perhaps the text is implying their imprisonment is both. We know that the reason for their imprisonment is because of the choices they had made while free. They had chosen death and curse over life and blessing. They had chosen to love, honor, and obey another god [idol]. They had chosen to disobey God by living a life-style displeasing to him. Thus, the consequences for their actions was exile – banishment from their promised land and forced to live in a foreign land where they “sat in darkness and in the shadow of death...in affliction and in irons.” They “sat” imprisoned in the consequences of their sins.

Sin is a crime against God and man. And “sin brings [with it] its own punishment (Ray Foucher).” Sin is a transgression that carries with it a sentence of earned consequences. In this case, as described in Psalm 107, the penalty for “spurning the counsel of the Most High” imposed upon them was ostracism for 48-70 years (depending on which starting date one chooses to reference as the beginning or end of the diaspora). A sentence [or judgment] to be carried out in a land not of their choice where they had to work hard both physically and spiritually in order to retain their identity as a people. A land where many of them died. A place where they were brought low, till they “bowed their hearts down” in sorrow and grief.

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Perhaps they asked themselves, “What happens now? What do we do? How do we clean up this mess we find ourselves in?” When they had repented crying out to the Lord seeking forgiveness, God “delivered them from their distress.”

The plain truth:

I believe many Methodists still attending UM churches now think and feel like they are prisoners, both physically and spiritually, sitting in darkness and the shadow of death in affliction and in irons. Many of our brothers and sisters have awakened to the truth that our message delivered to them during the unrest was twisted and distorted by those in the UMC who opposed your will. Now that the paths that led to freedom have been permanently closed, “some” have discovered not everything they had been told regarding their freedom to worship as they choose in the UMC is true. Regret fills their hearts and souls. I believe they, too, are asking, “What happens now? What do we do? How do we clean up this mess we find ourselves in? Who will come and guide us to a new city to dwell in?” They need our help. It is on behalf of these people, this “some,” that we pray for this week.

Lord, hear our prayers:

Lord, we know that you are able and willing to set “prisoners” free of their sins. To bring them “out of the darkness and the shadow of death and burst their bonds apart.” Let us pray this week that we do not now turn our backs on your people’s call for help. Help us to help them. We need a fresh approach to resolving a problem that continues to ensnare so many of your people. Our message remains the same: There is only one true gospel – yours, Jesus. All other messages that promise life eternal are false. Lord, our King of kings, send us, your clean-up crew, back into the darkness and shadow of death to continue the work we started. Doing our best to lend a hand clearing a path forward through the muck and mire – both physical and spiritual – that has bogged your people down. Reveal to us and your people the “backdoor” to the problem that will alleviate their distress. We pray that you, Lord, will enable us, empower us to help them let go of anything that chains them in place. Less the aftermath of our decades-long struggle to gain our freedom becomes their epitaph. May their doors of bronze and bars of iron be shattered by your steadfast love that endures forever. May they once more join us in concert thanking the Lord for “his wondrous works to the children of man!” Amen.

Week three: Ps 107:17-22 “Those Who Suffered for Their Own Folly”

Unlocking the mystery:

The Psalmist wrote, “Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of ‘their iniquities’ (immoral or wicked behavior that goes against God’s law or will) suffered affliction, they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.” In other words, they lacked good sense and fell victim to their own folly. They loathed feasting on God’s Word. Instead of preferring what tastes sweet

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in the mouth but sours in the stomach. “Is this the way you repay the Lord, you foolish and unwise people? Is he not your father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?” (Deuteronomy 32:6, NIV)

Pleasure became their god. Lust drove them into immoral behavior. The ESV commentators wrote, “[T]heir own folly (the stupidity that results from turning away from God) brought on their affliction.” The Lord’s people were duped by the lies they told themselves: That there is no consequence for “doing what is right in [our] own eyes.” (Judges 21:25) The Holman Bible Dictionary states “the persons who do not possess wisdom are called ‘fools’; their behavior is described as ‘folly.’ The foolish person is one who is thoughtless, self-centered, and obviously indifferent to God.”

So how many fools is the psalmist writing about? A few or many? A minority or the majority? Or an unspecified number in between? Group three may be the largest of the four groups identified in this psalm. What we do know for certain is that the number of exiles – past, present and future – returning home, “to a [new] city to dwell in,” is more than one and less than all.

The truth is that at one time or another in our lives, we all have played the fool. Lured by sensual pleasures and peer pressure, we have surrendered to the will of public opinion and demand. We took the path of least resistance – no accountability, no commitment, and no responsibility. We told ourselves a lie: “It’s okay. What’s wrong with enjoying what life has to offer and living it up a little?” Everything. Another psalmist wrote. “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.” (Psalm 14:1, ESV) “Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and have their fill of their own devices.” (Proverbs 1:31, ESV) Thank God for his mercy, saving grace, and steadfast love that endures forever.

I do believe the “fools” in vs.17-22 were those who willingly allowed themselves to be assimilated and indoctrinated into the culture of their masters (as is so often the case today) adopting their captors' ways and making them their own. This group chose to set aside all that they knew about the love of our Father, for his love for those he created. Like their ancestors in the wilderness, they turned their heads and hearts over to an amusing, absurd, impulsive, and fickle lifestyle. This “some” had swallowed the lie: “What’s wrong with having a little fun in life? It’s my life. I can do whatever I want with it.” They donned blinders, choosing to see only what they wanted to see and plugged their ears, choosing to hear only what they wanted to hear. Off they went ignoring the good advice and warnings of others still loyal to God. So, the Lord “bowed their hearts down with hard labor [submarginal living], then they fell down, with none to help.” I believe that when they were brought low, the people pondered (at least “some” of them did) asking of themselves, “What have we done? What is going to happen to us? What can we do? Where do we begin to clean up this mess we find ourselves in?” Eventually, they cried out to the Lord for help, and he delivered them from their distress. He healed them and released them from their destruction.

The plain truth:

There are now those among the constituency of the UMC who have removed their blinders and have awakened and now see the truth. Shaken into seeing reality. Now recognizing that the aftermath of living

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an ambiguous and ambivalent lifestyle – a lifestyle that dictates “anything goes” – is a life filled with repercussions. Thousands of our brothers and sisters have been hoodwinked by the UMC. They had willingly swallowed the lies guised as truth hook-line-and-sinker: The new gospel that teaches sin has no consequences. Lies that had been told to them by their trusted leaders. People whom they had placed upon pedestals and respected unconditionally. Regret overwhelms them. They now realize they have drawn near to the gates of death for they have awakened to the truth that they have been feasting on hogwash. Shame, guilt, embarrassment, frustration, and even anger confronts them. When asked by their brothers and sisters how they fare, they commonly hang their heads down low. Afraid they will be judged for their foolishness. Afraid that they will not be forgiven because of the foolish choices they have made. It is on behalf of these people, this “some,” that we pray for this week.

Lord, hear our prayers:

The Psalmist wrote, “[God] sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their distress.” Lord, we cannot turn our backs on those – the fool-hardy – who now seek deliverance. They are your people! Like the prodigal son, they have regained their good senses. Your people desire to return home. You have said, “Tell them. ‘As sure as I am the living God, I take no pleasure from the death of the wicked. I want the wicked to change their ways and live. Turn your life around! Reverse your evil ways. Why die, Israel?’” (Ezekiel 33:11, MSG) They have turned from their evil ways. We pray, Father, that you now “rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them in pity from sin and the grave; weep o’er the erring one, lift up the fallen” as we once more “tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.” (Rescue the Perishing, OGRP, 457) Lord, help us to do what is so often hard for the faithful to do – embrace those with love in our hearts those who made light, a joke, of your Word. Once more, Lord, once more, send in your servants, your clean-up crews, to help the foolish find their way home. With words of wisdom and encouragement on our lips, we will work together to help them dig out of the quagmire and sticky situations they have wallowed in with delight. The aftermath of our decades-long struggle to regain our freedom from the UMC was for naught. Father, your people [the some], our brothers and sisters, desire life over death, blessing over curse. May *all* Your people, including the fool-hardy, once more know that the steadfast love of God endures forever. May they once more join us in singing songs of praise and thanksgiving. Amen.

Week four: Ps 107:23-32 “Those Who Went Down to the Sea in Ships”

Unlocking the mystery:

The last group in the caravan is the story about the “some,” who “went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters,” that still needs to be sung. The ESV commentary informs us that “Israelites seldom went to sea on their own.” If this is the case, then most of this group of people may have gone down to the sea in ships not by choice but by command. They would most likely have been pressed into the king’s service filling the position of sailors aboard the king’s fleet of ships. (Much like Daniel and his company were pressed into the king’s service as administrators.)

The psalmist wrote “they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep.” While at sea, they saw with their own eyes “God in action, saw his breathtaking ways with the ocean; With a word he called

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up the wind – an ocean storm, towering waves!” (vs. 23-25, MSG) Everyone on board was tossed to-and-fro, up-and-down “reeling and staggering like drunken men.” Their courage melted away. They were at their wits end feeling confused, worried about what God might do next.

Every time I read this passage; I am reminded of what took place on the Sea of Galilee recorded in Mark 4:37-41. The story titled “The Wind Ran Out of Breath” as retold by Eugene Peterson in the Message. How the disciples faced a terrifying storm on the Sea of Galilee. They were amazed that Jesus lay, “head on a pillow,” (MSG) fast asleep in the stern of the boat. For the disciples were at their wits end. They had lost control of the boat. How they then banded together and found the courage to wake Jesus up asking, “Teacher, is it nothing to you that we are going down?” (MSG) How Jesus rebuked the wind and the sea and the storm ended. And how “Jesus reprimanded the disciples: ‘Why are you such cowards? Don’t you have any faith?’” (MSG)

“They saw the deeds of the Lord” and “his breathtaking ways with the ocean.” And it terrified them. Sin had led them into captivity. They presently lived under the rule of a foreign king. He controlled their lives, their every move. They were pressed into service to the king as sailors aboard his fleet of ships. An occupation they would most likely never have chosen for themselves. Now they were “stuck” on a boat that they believed was about sink. About to be swallowed up by the sea. Facing what appeared to be a hopeless situation. I can hear them crying out, “[God], is it nothing to you that we are going down?” Then he, the Lord of lords, made his presence known to them: “He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.” The psalmist did not record a reprimand in his song. But maybe he didn’t have to. Perhaps they had remembered the words written by Moses: “I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in who there is no faithfulness.” (Deuteronomy 32:20, ESV) I wonder if this was a “I saw the glory of the Lord pass by” moment for them. (ref. Exodus 33:21-23) God had delivered them, and then he “brought them to their desired haven.”

The plain truth:

Question: Is there such a thing as earthquake weather? Answer: “Very large low-pressure changes associated with major storm systems (typhoons, hurricanes, etc.) are known to trigger episodes of fault slip (slow earthquakes) in the Earth’s crust and may also play a role in triggering some damaging earthquakes [and tsunamis]. However, the numbers are small and are not statistically significant.” (USGC)

Question: Can animals predict earthquakes, and can “some” people sense that an earthquake is about to happen? Answer: “The earliest reference we have to unusual animal behavior prior to a significant earthquake is from Greece in 373 BC. Rats, weasels, snakes, and centipedes reportedly left their homes and headed for safety several days before a destructive earthquake.” And “There is no scientific explanation for the symptoms some people claim to have preceding an earthquake,” but ...? (USGC)

Okay, what do these facts have to do with Psalm 107? Plenty. As early as 1966, some Methodists sensed that “bad weather” was ahead of the church. That “something wicked this way [was coming].” (Ray Bradbury, 1962) As early as 1966, “some” Methodists sensed a change occurring in the church’s attitude regarding orthodoxy. In an article published by New Christian Advocate in 1967, Charles Keysor wrote,

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“Dr. Hessert believes that the present liberal influence will gradually give way to the newer theologies, which represent an evolution of old-fashioned liberalism.” In the Spring of 1967, Good News Magazine was launched. The tremors of discontent within The Methodist Church were becoming more and more noticeable to those sensitive to the fact that “something wicked” was coming.

On April 23, 1968, The United Methodist Church launched. Tremors within the constituency could now be felt and measured on the low end of the Richter Scale. Storm clouds began to gather more intensely on the horizon, and they appeared to be heading toward the church. The watchmen’s cry within the UMC grew louder, but the moderate to liberal movement within the church shouted them down. Over the next four decades, tremors increased and became more prevalent. The early signs of a major quake looming under and within the church could no longer be ignored. The UMC’s foundation began to crack and crumble. Many faithful conservatives expressed their concerns that the Spirit had “vacated the building.” Members began to disassociate from the church. The storm first seen on the horizon had moved so slowly that people had gotten used to its threatening presence. Now it hovered directly overhead in the form of a seemingly never-ending, full-blown hurricane – the winds of liberalism, progressivism, and wokeism shredded any hope of unity for the UMC. Conservatives could now see with their own eyes and hear with their own ears that without a shadow of doubt the King of kings had been replaced with a foreign king. The silent majority, the “some,” denied the new king’s power over them, and they refused to be pressed into his service. Then in the Spring of 2016, a 10.0 quake shook the church apart. Then the tsunami rushed in and carried away with it what little desire was left to reunite. This was not a statistically insignificant moment in the life of the church.

“Now the rest of the story.” (Paul Harvey) Everyone caught up in these two events was tossed to-and-fro, up-and-down “reeling and staggering like drunken men.” Courage melted away for some time. Many were at their wits end feeling confused, worried about what God might do next. For they had seen the deeds of the Lord and his breathtaking ways as they voyaged through the Sea of Discontent, and as they harbored in strange ports built on sand. They murmured amongst themselves (out of fear of being overheard), “Where do we begin? What do we do? How do we free ourselves from this mess we find ourselves in?”

The faithful “some” did not hesitate. They cried out in their trouble: “[Father], is it nothing to you that we are going down?” The King of kings – Jesus is his name – made his presence known to them: “He delivered them from their distress. [God] made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed” and the aftershocks of the great quake ceased. A new fleet of ships under the flag of the GMC was being built. They worshiped. But the hearts of many were then and are still now filled with sorrow. For the UMC had slipped down into the depths of the sea. The cry of those who remained onboard its sinking ships still echoes in the ears of the faithful. It is on behalf of these people, this “majority,” that we pray for this week.

Lord, hear our prayers:

The psalmist wrote, “He brought them to their desired haven.” Father, be merciful. Many of our brothers and sisters still feel like they are being tossed around in every direction. For them nothing has changed. We hear Your people’s cry for help, and we hear you calling in the night asking, “Who will bear My

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light to them? Whom shall I send?” (“Hear I am Lord,” OGRP) Lord, send us! Send your faithful servants back into the aftermath of the quake and storm that still lingers in the memories of thousands of fellow Methodists all around the world. There is still so much work to be done. We know that all our work begins with prayer. We know we must prepare anew for the things that will come our way and interfere with our progress to help make right what has been made wrong in the lives of those suffering from the aftermath of our man-made quake and gale. A quake so powerful that only the “some” were able to find sure footing to keep them upright for the ground had turned into sinking sand. Your faithful “some” have and will continue to trust you, Jesus, to bring victory for all who follow in your footsteps. We are confident that hope will return to your people, bringing with it a new sense of peace and joy in their lives. At the same time, we grieve for all those who choose to go down forever into the depths with the UMC. Have mercy on them. These things we pray in your presence. Amen.

Epilogue

I cannot remember the exact words of the person who first wrote this idiom, but this is how I recorded it in my memory: “The beginning is its own end, and the end is its own beginning.” Decades from now, the “some” will have grown into the “many.” They will sing a new song, an ode, a ballad that tells of the story of how the new church – the GMC – was born. With joyous hearts they will continue to “thank the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! Let the redeemed say so, whom he has redeemed from [the hand of the foe] and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.” And they will teach their young “If you are really wise, you’ll think this over – it’s time you appreciated God’s deep love.” (v 43, MSG)

Hallelujah and amen!