



I've always loved a good storm. While there's not much that's fun about being in a bad storm at sea, the tremendous power of the storm is truly awesome to behold. The same is true about storms on land. So long as we have a safe vantage point from which to watch, Jill and I enjoy the experience of a good storm.

We have, of course, experienced quite a storm since this time last week. I measured 28" of snow at my house here in Columbia, and Anna

measured 37" at our house in Virginia. That's what this photo depicts:

For many of us, the experience of stormy weather is a reminder of the presence and power of God, our Redeemer, who acts on our behalf. The theological word for God's appearing to humans, whether in storms or otherwise, is "theophany," or "face of God" (while the Incarnation is technically a theophany, it is not usually described in that way). One of the best-known storm theophanies is found in Psalm 18:8-16:



⁸ Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. ⁹ He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. ¹⁰ He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. ¹¹ He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—the dark rain clouds of the sky. ¹² Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. ¹³ The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. ¹⁴ He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy, with great bolts of lightning he routed them. ¹⁵ The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, LORD, at the blast of breath from your nostrils. ¹⁶ He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters.



Another famous storm theophany is found at the beginning of Ezekiel:

⁴ I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, ⁵ and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human, ⁶ but each of them had four faces and four wings. ⁷ Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. ⁸ Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. All four of them had faces and wings, ⁹ and the wings of one touched the wings of another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved. . . .



²⁵ Then there came a voice from above the vault over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. ²⁶ Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. ²⁷ I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. ²⁸ Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking. ¹ He said to me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.” (Ezekiel 1:4-9, 25-2:1).

And finally, the longest and most overwhelming storm theophany in the Bible comes at the end of Job. Try to imagine yourself on the receiving end of this discourse:

¹ Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: ² “Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? ³ Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.

⁴ “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. ⁵ Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? ⁶ On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone— ⁷ while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

⁸ “Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, ⁹ when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, ¹⁰ when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, ¹¹ when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt’?

¹² “Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place, ¹³ that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it? ¹⁴ The earth takes shape like clay under a seal; its features stand out like those of a garment. ¹⁵ The wicked are denied their light, and their upraised arm is broken.

¹⁶ “Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep? ¹⁷ Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you seen the gates of the deepest darkness? ¹⁸ Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this.

¹⁹ “What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside? ²⁰ Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings? ²¹ Surely you know, for you were already born! You have lived so many years!





22 "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail, 23 which I reserve for times of trouble, for days of war and battle? 24 What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed, or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth? 25 Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm, 26 to water a land where no one lives, an uninhabited desert, 27 to satisfy a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass? 28 Does the rain have a father? Who fathers the drops of dew? 29 From whose womb comes the ice? Who gives birth to the frost from the heavens

30 when the waters become hard as stone, when the surface of the deep is frozen?

31 "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades? Can you loosen Orion's belt? 32 Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs? 33 Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?

34 "Can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water? 35 Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, 'Here we are'? 36 Who gives the ibis wisdom or gives the rooster understanding? 37 Who has the wisdom to count the clouds? Who can tip over the water jars of the heavens 38 when the dust becomes hard and the clods of earth stick together?



39 "Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions 40 when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket? 41 Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?

1 "Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? 2 Do you count the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth? 3 They crouch down and bring forth their young; their labor pains are ended. 4 Their young thrive and grow strong in the wilds; they leave and do not return.



5 "Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied its ropes? 6 I gave it the wasteland as its home, the salt flats as its habitat. 7 It laughs at the commotion in the town; it does not hear a driver's shout. 8 It ranges the hills for its pasture and searches for any green thing.

9 Will the wild ox consent to serve you? Will it stay by your manger at night? 10 Can you hold it to the furrow with a harness? Will it till the valleys behind you? 11 Will you rely on it for its great strength? Will you leave your heavy work to it? 12 Can you trust it to haul in your grain and bring it to your threshing floor?

¹³ “The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, though they cannot compare with the wings and feathers of the stork. ¹⁴ She lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand, ¹⁵ unmindful that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them. ¹⁶ She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in vain, ¹⁷ for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense. ¹⁸ Yet when she spreads her feathers to run, she laughs at horse and rider.

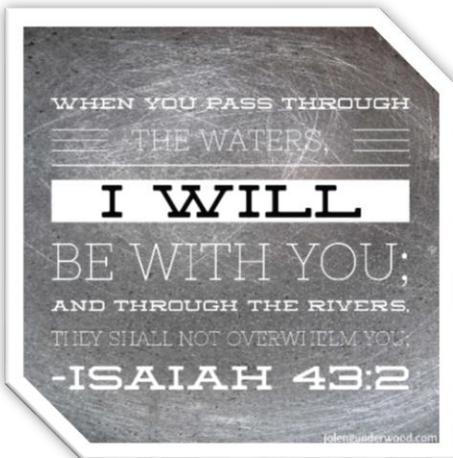


¹⁹ “Do you give the horse its strength or clothe its neck with a flowing mane? ²⁰ Do you make it leap like a locust, striking terror with its proud snorting? ²¹ It paws fiercely, rejoicing in its strength, and charges into the fray. ²² It laughs at fear, afraid of nothing; it does not shy away from the sword. ²³ The quiver rattles against its side, along with the flashing spear and lance. ²⁴ In frenzied excitement it eats up the ground; it cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds. ²⁵ At the blast of the trumpet it snorts, ‘Aha!’ It catches the scent of battle from afar, the shout of commanders and the battle cry.

²⁶ “Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread its wings toward the south? ²⁷ Does the eagle soar at your command and build its nest on high? ²⁸ It dwells on a cliff and stays there at night; a rocky crag is its stronghold. ²⁹ From there it looks for food; its eyes detect it from afar. ³⁰ Its young ones feast on blood, and where the slain are, there it is.”

¹ The LORD said to Job: ² “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!”

³ Then Job answered the LORD: ⁴ “I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. ⁵ I spoke once, but I have no answer— twice, but I will say no more” (Job 38:1-40:5).



These images are all pretty awesome, are they not? I’m glad to have a God so powerful, but I’m also very grateful that the God of the storm is also the Good Shepherd: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. . . . My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:11, 27-29).

In sunny times or in stormy times, I’m grateful to share the journey with you.

Dave