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Storms

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Storms

James Calvin Schaap

"Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

I think it's nice that most people love to sleep. Outside my window right now the only sound is crickets. It's not yet five a.m., and in small Midwestern towns like this one, very little moves. The moon, a street-light, sits directly above, the temperature just about seventy degrees, and it's windstill, a rarity on the Plains. Just for an hour or so, I don't mind having the world, seemingly, to myself.

We're in the waning days of summer. In an hour I'll pick up my camera and head out west. With this high of a temperature, some despoiling mist may lolly-gag in low spots. If I'm lucky, a touch of fogginess will make the dawn even more gorgeous.

I have in mind that David wasn't thinking of storms when he was listening to God speak in the skies. I'd guess he was having a look at the kind of morning I'm about to enter when I head west in an hour—something caramel maybe, something streaked with gold, something shimmering, something variegated, some vision a camera can't even grab, maybe some light clouds like a carelessly thrown shawl about the shoulders of the perfect dawn.

But if I'd turn on the television right now, I'd likely see dramatic radar shots of Hurricane Francis, presently raging through the Bahamas, its eye set on the Florida coast. Francis is huge, almost as big as Texas, people were saying yesterday. Two million Floridians have crowded gas stations, then simply left behind their homes and businesses because authorities would like the place as silent as it is right now outside my window.

In a week or so it will all be over—whatever destruction the monster causes will be photographed and archived, and men and women with chainsaws will buzz their way through the debris, bound and determined to clean up the mess and rebuild. But this morning, right now on the peninsula we call Florida, those who are going to ride out the storm are likely as awake as I am, waiting.

If the heavens declare God's glory, if the firmament displays his hand, and if the message of his reality goes out every day—every minute, every hour—in every language, and to every corner of the world, then God's very presence is there too in the swirling danger of a lumbering hurricane that threatens to destroy a significant swath of southern Florida. In an hour or so, when I drive out west, turn, and face the dawn, I will hear his Word, just as they will, or are—those who stand right now on deserted beaches and look west into a grand mess of stormy danger. But we'll hear different sermons.

God is love. We are thrilled to say it, comforted by its truth. He will not forsake us no matter what the danger. The catechism by which I was reared begins with this question: "What is your only comfort?" And the answer is that I belong to him.

But his word from a hurricane, or the killer tornadoes that march through the prairies from May to July, is at least this—that we shouldn't really take him or his love for granted. He is God, after all, and we aren't. We are his creatures, the works of his hands; but he is the Supreme Architect, the Creator of the Universe. He doesn't just ride along in the heavens, he speaks when its vastness overwhelms, when its beauty beguiles, and when its storms surge and even swallow us.

What it says, always, is very simple: He is God.