

***A Rose by Any Other Name...***  
**By Pastor Richard Boatman**

As I write this article, the sound of hammers can be heard in the background. Siding and windows are being replaced. Looking out my south office window the sun is warming the crisp morning air for a roofing crew that's ripping off damaged shingles from a nearby home. On the corner of our nearest intersection stand three signs advertising various restoration crews. Eldora is rebuilding. But on Sunday morning, August 9<sup>th</sup>, our thoughts were just on surviving.

It's an eerie thing to have lights go out in the middle of a sermon, particularly when a sanctuary does not have much natural light. (It gives "preaching up a storm" a whole new meaning.) Within seconds of the dim backup lights engaging, it came—the winds, the rain...and then the hail. Like a gathering of golfers driving balls through our windows, the hail beat and buffeted the north and west sides of our building. Glass shattered and fragments were strewn about the floor. Our historic stain glass windows were not spared as the raging ice balls, fueled by 80 plus mile-an-hour winds, pelted and punished the sacred scenes.

The hail stopped but the rain continued, relentlessly. Thank the Lord, no one was hurt. In pockets we gathered in different places assessing the damage. One glass door was completely broken out while another could not be opened because several inches of frozen fury held it tightly shut. As the rains subsided we gazed at our vehicles. Windows were shattered and car bodies were dented like scarred remains from an icy plague. People drove away cautiously peering through fractured, cobwebbed windows and maneuvering around glass covered interiors as best they could.

And then we came home. Ours was worse than some but better than many others. Glass shrapnel and water from ten broken parsonage windows greeted us in mock hospitality. Drapes were ripped, blinds were bent and screens were partially shredded. Our computer keyboard and mouse were bathed in moisture. Much of our furniture sparkled with small glassy splinters. Our back entryway lay under a quarter inch of water, my awaiting tennis shoes soaked. They still smell.

With apprehension we ascended our stairwell. My upstairs office was hit quite hard. Like many clergy, I live in a world of books and ideas. Water is not a friend to the printed word. Numerous volumes lay soaked, the early stages of literary arthritis now bending their proud pages. My oak desk, often cluttered, was now blanketed with layer-upon-layer of immersed parchments.

Our watery tour continued in our son Caleb's room. Nine year olds often think more about toys and computer game systems than books. Both his longtime pirate ship and recently acquired civil war set had taken on new realism with the remnants of the wind-swept glassy warzone. Legos and maps and posters were also not immune. It was a microcosm of our town.

We walked outside, light rain still falling. Glass, shingles, slivers of siding, downed branches, sticks—all kinds of debris now adorned our corner lot. But movement in the neighborhood had begun. Others just like us, initially stunned, were now outdoors assessing their damage, strategizing, making calls from cell phones. We were thankful to be alive, rejoicing that no one was seriously injured.

It's a bit of a blur, but before too long friends, members of churches, civic organizations, youth groups, etc. were all moving about the community with ant-like activity covering windows with plastic and plywood, sawing and hauling and raking. We had weathered the storm together and were now working together to bring hope.

A symbol of this hope came to me the following Sunday in the form of a rose. One of our parishioners from a farm family brought it to me in a vase. The stem had been bruised, the leaves bent and battered, but crowning it all was the glory of its scarlet bloom, radiant and completely whole. I held it before our congregation worshipping in a sanctuary now devoid of its red carpet and pew pads and accented with temporary wood-filled windows. "Like this rose," I said, "we have been bruised and bent and battered but we are still blooming!" Our assembly broke into spontaneous applause. Jesus, our risen Savior and Lord, remains our steadfast hope.

And it is this that continues to fill our church and community. All of us who weathered the recent hail storm have experienced loss. But in visiting with so many, the common theme I have heard is not discouragement but hope. Our community has come together in ways that perhaps only common suffering can create. Everything is not perfect, but in most cases a sense of healing and rebuilding is replacing a sense of loss; laughter is replacing sadness.

The symbol of the rose is alive in us. I hear it now through the pounding of nails into fresh boards. I see it as new shingles are readied to repair a roof. I feel it in the firm handshakes and hardy hugs of fellow worshipers heading back to their bandaged homes. We've been bruised; we've been bent; we've been battered. But thank the Lord, we're still blooming!