

In Ida's Wake

An essay by -- James Blaine -- Sept., 2021

AIR and WATER -- Both of these are necessities for sustaining all human life. Without air, we can only live for a few minutes, and without water, life will end in measured days.

For inhaling deep breaths and for feeling the wind on our face, the air, as an unseen gift, is ever near. Water, the simple compound of two atoms, is readily available for us at the turn of a tap. Far more than just for drinking, water serves us for many purposes: -- for the greening of our earth, and even for our recreation and transportation.

Ida/2021 was born somewhere out in the Atlantic as just a disturbance, but, over a few days, she grew in strength as she inched her way northwest. Though never invited, she came ashore on the Louisiana and Mississippi coastlines with....."way too much of a good thing.", that is, with lots and lots of just-- air and water. We do need them both, but certainly not as Ida brought them.

Ida's clouds, now gorging with water from her ocean and gulf travel, dumped a month's worth of rain in a few hours. Her fierce winds blew upon everything in its path with hurricane intensity. Rivers and streams overflowed, communities were inundated. trees were toppled, homes flooded, and cars swamped. Nothing could withstand the fierce onslaught of Ida's raw power and vast amounts of-- air and water.

Ida marked a ruinous path north for a thousand miles, all the way into New England. She caused widespread destruction, an

untimely disruption of everyday life, and tragically, even the deaths of dozens of our citizens, young and old.

As Ida moved on, and the winds calmed, the first area of concern was not for the buildings damaged, but for the welfare of the persons trapped and endangered by flood waters. With no authority issuing orders, some timely things began occurring in the countless communities affected. --- Scores of men, leaving their jobs, began the task of rescuing stranded storm victims, bringing each one to safety. All resources were made available for the immediate need of reaching every flood victim.

As the hours and days passed, these rescues were followed by the monumental task of recovery. In every community, residents took note of Ida's widespread damages--- with some situations being far worse than others. Recovery's daunting task lay ahead, and as the skies finally brightened, the light of loving helpfulness began to shine through the dismal conditions which Ida left behind. Neighbors began to help their neighbors, sometimes reaching across racial and social status lines to do so. Condolences were kindly offered along with helping hands.

Streams of unpaid volunteers began to flow into every affected community with an outpouring of practical assistance and a compassionate spirit. The grueling work of recovery went on for days. Willing hands helped to empty basements, carry out ruined property, and to muck out the mud from inside homes. FEMA and the Red Cross did their part, but it was the toil and kindness of ordinary folks which "won the day". Most notably, too, generosity flowed freely as donations came from near and far to fund the recovery efforts.

Along with the destruction, came the painful awareness of the fleeting value of one's earthly belongings, lost so quickly and harshly. Material things that one depended upon, or were

emotionally attached to, were now ruined or gone. It became a time of tears and heartache.

But, in Ida's aftermath, despite the ruin and material loss that she left behind, there was an inspiring and far greater value in the helpful assistance and compassion expressed by neighbors, friends, and even by strangers. The value of such outreach and care cannot be measured in dollars, because human hearts have a different scale for value.

People began seeing one another just as fellow survivors, and members of the same human family. For that time, and in such dire circumstances, all personal distinctions and differences faded.

-- Racial issues, vaccine and mandate status, economic levels, political positions, and even party loyalty,--- all of them took second place to the giving of oneself to assist Ida's victims.

Obviously, the Creator's hand could be recognized in Ida's basic elements of air and water, but it is seen even more in the inspiration for the expressions of helping hands and caring words offered by so many. It is clearly seen, too, in the response to life's greatest commandments, as spoken by Jesus Christ: **“You shall love the Lord God with all your heart, with all your soul, your mind and strength, and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

In Ida's wake, she left behind what is even more essential to human life than air and water. She left behind the need and the opportunity for having personal relations with others where love, dedication, and respect will bring meaning and color to life. Loving our families, of course, comes naturally, but it is a real challenge to regard other persons, near and far, as our

“neighbor”,
and to relate to each one honestly, carefully, and with a degree of
kindness. In our United States,---- so divided into angry camps, it
seems that Ida has come along to show us a better way.