

ISAIAH 25:1-5
#STRONGER THAN STORMS

I want you to shut your eyes and think about your house; imagine you've been away from home for a while, on holiday, or visiting friends. What is the part of your house you most look forward to seeing again? What is your favourite part of your house?

(I have a box of lego – will someone build us a house?)

If we made a house of all bits you like it would have... what?

Did anyone say "walls" or "roof"? Why not? But a house without walls or roof... What would that be like to live in? What job do the walls do? What job does the roof do? We take these bits for granted, they are just there; it is only when they are not there, do we really notice the job they do to keep us warm and dry and safe.

Meet Zaza; she is 8 years old and for 5 months she lived in a house without a roof. Zaza lives on the island of Haiti in the Caribbean and 2 years ago Hurricane Matthew hit Haiti, with winds up to 165mph. Zaza was at home in bed and she and her family were warned that a hurricane was coming; her family knew their house wasn't very strong, so they ran to the shelter; everyone was soaked to the skin by the lashing rain. The wind was so strong that it blew lots of trees over and Zaza just escaped being crushed by a falling coconut tree. In the shelter they were safe from the storm, but when the storm had passed, and they went back home they discovered that the wind had blown the roof of their house right off. Zaza's family are poor and had no money to buy a new roof, so for 5 months they had to live in a house with no roof. Christian Aid has helped replace Zaza's roof with a nice new one, a strong one; so now she doesn't need to worry about hurricanes but can enjoy her 2 favourite things – reading and skipping. Zaza says, "I like it when my friends come to the house and we all play hide and seek."

This is Marcelin and his 3 daughters. They lost everything when Hurricane Matthew hit Haiti. Now they live in a concrete block 2metres by 2metres. There are no windows or doors; the only furniture they have is a single bed which dad shares with his 3 daughters; it is so hot! Marcelin does everything: he cooks, cleans and cares for his girls; he can't afford to send them to school anymore and he struggles even to provide enough food for them; sometimes they go hungry. Marcelin is worried about his daughters and they are worried about him, that he might become sick. He calls on God to give him faith and strength to care for his children. If Marcelin could have a new house that would give them a safe place and it would give them strength to keep going. £210 would train someone to be a local builder and then lots of people could have comfortable homes and the strength to live a better life.

"You have..." (Isaiah 25:4) God is someone who protects people and gives them strength! Isaiah sees a people who are being threatened by storms: some of these are real storms like hurricane Matthew, but some of the 'storms' are ruthless people who want to hurt and damage people who are poor. God is the refuge of His people when these storms come, a place to run to when they are afraid, to find help and strength. A refuge is a safe place, a place where we can go when there is danger around and be kept safe and that is how Isaiah sees God; God is that refuge, that safe place; people learn to trust Him. No matter what dangers threaten His people, God is enough for all of them. God is stronger than the storms and is able to help His people when they are in need; when these storms are people who come to threaten His people, God is still able to help His people and protect them and so often their enemies have been chased away by God's power and His people were kept safe. People like Zaza and Marcelin and Vilia have learned to call on God who is stronger than storms, to help them and keep them safe.

I first saw this legend as a cartoon with a man sitting on bench thinking about people who are poor and about to pray and about to ask God "why are there so many poor people in the world when You can do something about it?" He stops himself from asking God that question – why?

Because, he says, “I’m afraid that God will ask me the same question!” Part of the way in which God works to be the refuge for people in our world is through what we do! When we do nothing, people suffer; but when we act then people across the world are helped and kept safe. What can we do?

We can **give**: £210 would train someone in Haiti to build strong houses, strong enough to stand up to hurricanes and earthquakes! It’s not much really, is it? We can give to help Christian Aid and other groups to work in places like Haiti to help people who are poor, and our money given like this can help lots of people. So, grab an envelope today and take it home; bring it back next week with some money in it and put it in the bag; if you pay tax and can claim Gift Aid, then sign the slip and put it inside the envelope too, and Christian Aid can claim a little more from the government to help even more people.

We can **campaign**: these are Tearfund cards, but we can mix things up today. These cards are to try to persuade the World Bank to give money to small projects across the world that will give electricity that is renewable and green. Let me tell you about the village of Madzangina in the Democratic Republic of Congo: it is remote, there are no roads, the village is over the river and there is no bridge; you can’t get to hospital easily if you’re sick. Isabelle has just had a baby; before, the hospital was 3 hours away and it is hard to get a motorbike (taxi) to take you there in the middle of the night. The local Church, with support from Tearfund, has built its own clinic with two nurses and electricity from a solar panel on the roof. Isabelle’s baby was born at 4am, a healthy boy, born in her village with help of 2 nurses and light from solar panel. If you want to persuade the World Bank to invest in this kind of project, then take one of these cards away and sign it and send it to Tearfund.

We can **pray**: in a little while I’m going to ask you to take the brick you were given when you came it and write a prayer on it for people like Marcelin, Vilia and Zaza. We’re going to make a house of these prayers and then put some of these prayers together and these will be our prayers for Christian Aid today; but you can pray some more on your own. Remember these stories and pray for these people that God would be their refuge and strength today and every day; use our prayer focus to help you. God listens to our prayers and answers us; God does more in response to our prayers than we ever know.

We can give, campaign, pray – we can make a difference to our world. There are so many people in need and by doing these three things we can make a huge difference to the world and to the lives of people in need – an 8-year old girl, a dad and his teenage daughters, Vilia (hear her story in a minute)

Jesus and His friends were in the boat, crossing the lake. A storm came up all of sudden and the sea became wild as the wind whipped up the water; the waves were breaking over the boat and it nearly filled up with water and it nearly turned over. The disciples were frightened; some of them were fishermen and were used to these storms, but for others maybe this was their first storm. Jesus was asleep in the back of the boat and they woke Him up; “*Don’t you care if we drown?*” (Mark 4:38) He woke up and saw the storm. He said “*Quiet! Be still!*” (Mark 4:39) and the story tells us that the wind died down and it was completely calm. Jesus is stronger than the storms- that’s what His friends discovered!

We don’t often have storms; hurricanes hardly ever happen here. When they do, our houses are damaged, but not often knocked down. There are other storms, things that make us afraid: our exams, we fall out with friends, there are family crises, we suffer from ill-health. Jesus is stronger than these storms too! God is a refuge for us and a shelter from these storms and we can trust Him for our storms. God is stronger than the storms!