*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Welcoming Samuel to the world amid chaos, turbulence**

*Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, “Here I am.”*

*1 Samuel 3:4*

It was the calm before the storm late Friday afternoon, July 19.

Outside Mayo Clinic Health System-Northland hospital in Barron, it was sweltering. A blanket of hot, humid air with temperatures in the 90s and dew points in the 70s spread across the entire state and beyond. Just to the north, a record-strong July jet stream stretched across the northern plains and southern Canada.

Inside the air-conditioned hospital, my daughter-in-law, Lucy Hardie, was having a baby. Her water broke and contractions were underway. My son, Ross, was providing us text updates on the progress of their first child.

The weather grew more ominous. The National Weather Service in Chanhassen, Minnesota, took an atmospheric sounding — and found the highest measure of Convective Available Potential Energy ever measured there.

The reading was so high that the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration’s Storm Prediction Center issued a “potentially dangerous situation” severe-thunderstorm watch, predicting potential peak wind gusts of as high as 105 mph. The last time such a watch was issued was in 2009, according to The Weather Channel.

Potential became reality when the derecho — an extremely unstable weather condition that creates a line of intense, widespread and fast-moving windstorms and thunderstorms — developed between the Twin Cities and Duluth, dumping baseball-sized hail.

The storm grew into a monster and quickly moved east at 60 mph. Just 50 miles east of Barron, a trained spotter in Cushing recorded a wind gust of 84 mph and sustained winds of 73 mph for five minutes. The squall line was fully developed, sweeping across northern Wisconsin.

Barron was in the storm’s path.

At 6:08 p.m. Ross sent a text, “All is delayed for now except the contractions because of the tornado warning. We are in a break room in the hospital.”

I immediately went to the National Weather Service website and found that the tornado warning for Barron had just expired. I messaged Ross.

“You should be back in your room shortly.”

Ross messaged back, “I read the same thing, but now the fire alarm is going off in the building.”

I replied, “What the hell?”

Ross texted, “Another wing of the building took on water, it sounds like. Still in the changing-room closet for now but the alarms are gone.”

We were 100 miles away and frustrated about how we could help. We asked Ross if Lucy needed to be transferred to Eau Claire, where we assumed there was at least power. We were also grateful Lucy’s mother was there to advocate.

“So far so good,” Ross messaged. “I think they are waiting until 7 to move us back to the room. She is being strong. They are still monitoring everything using a battery pack.”

We later learned that a transfer at that point would not have worked.

Lucy returned to her room. She was dilated to 6 cm — at the extreme range of being able to receive an anesthetic epidural. She received it just in time.

8:49 p.m. “Lucy’s doctor is almost here. Things have progressed well. The epidural did wonders for Lucy. The on-call staff has been amazing in the in-between. I think it will happen tonight but not sure how soon.”

A few minutes later, “OK, (the doctor) told us both to lie down for an hour before the pushing starts, hah.”

I messaged back, “Good luck with that. Send us word no matter what the time.”

That was 9:10 p.m. I seldom sleep with my phone next to the bed, but kept it close by. Sherry and I watched TV for a while, but kept the lamp on while we dozed. Or should I say I dozed; Sherry kept waiting for news.

A phone alert went off.

“Is that Ross?” Sherry said, pulling on my arms to wake me up.

“Nope,” I said. “Just ESPN telling me the Brewers lost another game.”

The lack of news was killing us. We knew they were in good hands, but what was going on? I tried to fight back the despair.

Finally, at 3:05, I messaged, “Update?”

Silence.

Prayers.

At the same time, the derecho was in its final stages of a 485-mile trail of damage and destruction during a 10-hour period, blowing out over southern Michigan with a 58-mph wind gust in Kalamazoo.

At 4:41 a.m. Saturday, the message we were waiting for arrived.

The Lord had answered.

“He’s here, 20 minutes ago.”

A photo of Samuel Alan Hardie appeared on the screen. Our fourth grandson had entered the world. He is the first male in the family since his father was born 31 years ago; he will carry on the Hardie name.

Two days later, the tiny bundle of joy was in my arms. In the midst of chaos and turbulence came a wonderful gift with a headful of dark hair, a connection to his namesake Nazarite from the Old Testament who never cut his hair.

Ross and Lucy have tried for several years to have a baby. Two years ago, they lost a baby early in the pregnancy. Many prayers have been said since we heard the wonderful news nine months ago.

I gently stroked Samuel’s soft cheek.

Prayers answered.

Samuel was here.

Samuel means, “God has heard.”

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