

“PAUL SHIPWRECKED ON MALTA.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Texts for the Sermon: Acts 27:27-44

Prayer: Holy Father, like a stream of water direct all our hearts and minds to the truth of your Word and its application to our lives. Come, Holy Spirit, hear and help, for the sake of Jesus, in whose name we are bold to make all our requests. Amen.

Introduction.

Over three weeks ago, Paul and his friends boarded this ill-fated ship. It has been a difficult journey the entire way, first contrary winds slowing them down and then a terrible storm blowing them 500 miles across the Mediterranean.

We can understand the storm that blew against Jonah. God was keeping a prodigal prophet from fleeing further from His presence. That storm was meant to bring Jonah back to his senses, to repentance and obedience. But Paul wasn't fleeing, in fact Paul was totally obedient, he wanted to go to Rome to preach the Gospel. Why did Paul have to face all this suffering at the mercy of an unmerciful sea?

Why did it seem God opposed them the whole way? We are reminded of the reality of life, Christians are not promised a life spared from crises or traumatic events, even Christians of the highest standing like the apostle Paul. Paul was a godly, mature Christian, and yet God was still working in his life, testing, refining, increasing his faith, producing holiness.

Tests, trials, and suffering are all meant to refine us, to build our faith, to strengthen us. It is especially important we teach this to our children while they are young.

Remember the words written down by Moses in Deuteronomy 6.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

This isn't just referring to singing Jesus loves me for the Bible tells me so, or how all the animals went into the ark, or how Jesus was born a sweet little baby in a manger and later died of a cross but rose from the dead. All true and good.

But in the midst of doing life, when you encounter trials and troubles teach your children and grandchildren from an early age what it really means, what God says about tests and suffering and where He is and what He is doing. Teach them early so when they are older

they will have faith to understand what is happening to them and not abandon God or shipwreck their faith.

We came across a children's book recently that teaches this. *The Moon is Always Round*, by Jonathan Gibson. It is the author's true story of helping their son deal with the death of their stillborn daughter.

Just as the moon is always round despite its different phases, even when you can't see it, so also God's goodness is present in the most difficult of times, even if we can't always see it. I noticed some of the reviewers on Amazon didn't like the book, because it was too sad. There is picture of a tiny casket in it. But its real, there are dark times we need to prepare our children for.

Even if you don't buy the book, the phrase "the moon is always round" is a good motto in tough times. Read Acts 27, even when the sun, moon and stars are completely obscured, the moon is always round, and God is always good. He will never leave you or forsake you. Christ is risen.

Acts 27:27-32, land ho!

After fourteen days they can tell they are approaching land and since it is midnight, and they fear crashing on rocks in the dark they let down four anchors to try to hold fast and pray for daylight.

Sailors abandoning ship.

The men who should have been ensuring the safety and security of everyone else on the ship were looking to abandon ship under the pretense of securing the ship. This is cowardly, this is the most unmanly kind of character and action. They dishonored their profession, their duty.

This is the worst kind of sin, seeking to abandon ship and those on it. Those who should go down with the ship are the first to try to flee.

John 10:11-13 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

Men don't be those sailors. Take responsibility, especially for those God has given you. Man up.

Notice what happens. Paul sees what they are doing, and he knows why they are doing it. Paul was a man's man, a man of discernment and judgement. Paul names the sin, names the deception, names it before anyone else knows, and he opposes the evil, he stands up to it.

If ever there was a generation that needed men like Paul, it is today, men with discernment, men who will not be silent but speak up, who will call sin sin, and evil evil, and point it out.

We need men who will be leaders like this and set an example in their homes, churches, schools, community. Men, be who God made you to be. Use godly discernment for the sake of souls. I urge you young men at school or work, start now. You see the sin, don't be idle, don't participate by your silence. Warn them out of care for their souls.

Paul boldly tells the centurion, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." If you let this happen you will die. This warning is love.

Why does Paul say the rest of the passengers can't be saved without the sailors? Would their absence negate God's power or God's promise? God is not bound by means and cause and effect, but God does ordain means and uses them in accomplishing His purposes and promises.

The sailors skill and knowledge are necessary to guide the ship, man the sails and rudders. And they are included in God's promise to show them His salvation.

Cutting the small boat lose insured the sailors would be especially diligent to save the ship and all on it, including themselves.

When we are in a storm we are going to struggle with our flesh and our faith. Our flesh is going to look for pragmatic solutions, human solutions, man-centered solutions. Let's jump ship, get in this little boat, and make a run for it, let's take our chances, maybe we can make it to shore.

We will try to devise our own way of escape, take matters into our own hands. Who wouldn't want to get out of that ship as soon as possible? We will have to fight our flesh in order to depend on faith in God and His promises. Stay in the boat until Jesus says to get out.

Acts 27:33-38, eat, not a hair will fall from your head.

Paul is clearly a man of great faith, but he is also a prudent and practical man of common sense. He knows they are weak and will need strength to get themselves to shore. There are times to pray, by all means, and there are times to eat. Their lives are in danger, and they need to eat.

The same principle applies to our spiritual lives. We will be weak and overtaken by life's challenges if we have neglected to feed our souls if we have fasted from the Word and prayer.

How would you describe your spiritual condition, are malnourished, or well fed?

Paul is a leader, he sets a good example, he does what he asks them to do.

That is true for all of us, to do what we say, to practice what we preach/teach. Let us not be hypocrites at home or work or school or church, professing one thing and doing another.

He takes bread, gives thanks for it as is his daily custom, and he eats.

Paul was a man of God and a man of action, a man of the Spirit and of common sense. Spiritual and practical. He prayed earnestly and he judged the situation and said what should be done. We can and should be both.

“Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.”

Paul is simply saying, God has promised to save you all, and He will do it completely.

Oh that we all had a friend in our lives who speaks God’s truth to us in distressing situations, that person who points us to the light, that person who reminds us of where our hope and security lie. A friend in our distress is a true gift and friend.

Acts 27:39-44, shipwreck on the rocks; all were brought safely to land.

At last, day light, and better yet land, and best of all a beach. Never was a beach so welcome. But, God has yet one more trial for them to endure.

Are you kidding me? Why can’t they just run up on the shore of a sandy beach? Why a reef? Why the ship being battered and broken? Had they come this close only to be cast into the sea and drowned? But God did say to Paul the ship would be lost.

Often God makes situations darker, more difficult, removing all human hope or confidence. God is a God of obstacles, hindrances, barriers. One more thing to be surmounted, one more thing to be prayed over.

God makes them abandoned the last vestige of human hope, the ship, so He alone is the one to save them.

Even when everything is going against us, even when the whole world is against us, even when the powers of darkness are against us, nothing can keep God from being for us.

Soldiers plan to kill the prisoners.

Again, men looking to save their own skin, willing to kill others. The world is full of men like this, serving only themselves and demanding others serve them.

Roman law said any soldier who allowed a prisoner to escape was himself subject to the same penalty the prisoner would have received.

What incredible ingratitude. After all Paul had done for them. He prayed for them, and God granted their souls to be saved with Paul. Paul urged the soldiers to cut the sailor's boat free so none escaped, so they would all be saved together. Paul urged them to eat, and so strengthened and encouraged them. Such ingratitude, such unbelief in the face of so much of God's grace.

It strikes me that is what sin is. Sin is ingratitude and unbelief in the face of God's grace and goodness.

Anger and impatience are trusting ourselves and our desires and wills more than God. Lust and porn are selfishly wanting our own pleasure over God's pure provision, His best. Greed is selfishly looking to our own needs, wants, desires over God's provision and care. Sin is selfishness in the face of God's grace, unbelief in the face of His truth.

What the soldiers are planning to do is the most shameful display of ingratitude, unbelief, rejection of God and God's promises. They forget everything that got them to this point.

Don't be those soldiers. Don't look only to your own interests, but to the best interests of others. The centurion did that, he saved Paul, as Paul saved the centurion.

Overboard.

At last they all abandon ship, and all are delivered alive safely to land. The fearful long journey is finally over. In the merciful and miraculous providence of God all are saved from death.

The last word is spoken. The promise of God is kept.

Vs. 44 And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

Salvation belongs to our God. The world's salvation belongs to God, and the redemptive purposes of God cannot be stopped.

We were 276 souls.

Don't underestimate these little parenthetical tidbits in God's Words. Why does Luke tell us the number? Luke wants us to see the magnitude of the miracle.

The sailors may be the only experienced swimmers. Even having eaten everyone is in a weakened state after two weeks of trauma. Then consider the chaos and confusion of jumping overboard into a pounding surf and pieces of the ship all around. How is it that none were injured or drowned or caused others to drown? God stretched out His hand and guided every one of them to safety. Not one was lost.

Implications and application.

They put down four anchors to hold them fast and keep them from breaking up on the rocks in the dark. From Acts 27 we learn of four anchors we can put down in the midst of our storms.

The anchor of God's presence.

Acts 27:23 For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship

The anchor of God's ownership.

Acts 27:23 For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship

The anchor of God's sovereign promises.

Acts 27:24 He said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.'

The anchor of our faith in God.

Acts 27:25 So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.

Romans 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Soli Deo Gloria, to God alone belongs all the glory.

Prayer: Holy Father in heaven, all of us know the contrary winds that seem to hinder our progress and the storms that blow us to places never expected. By your sovereign grace keep us secure in your presence and power, keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and not on the waves, and grant that the gales of your mercy blow us safely into the harbor of heaven where all storms cease forever. Until then increase our faith that we never make shipwreck of it, give us courage and boldness, and enable us to live as to be an encouragement to those around us. For the sake of Jesus, our anchor and our rock, Amen.