

## 9 July – Acts 27:1-32 – The Lord in the Storm

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### 1. Where is God in the midst of the storm?

I love the ocean. Even on a wet, wild, winter day, walking on the beach gives such a sense of freedom. And in summer, from as young as I can remember, I've loved swimming at the beach, feeling the power of waves surging around me.

But in ancient Jewish thinking, the sea was a source of terror. The waters of the sea represent the deep, dark, powerful forces of chaos. In Genesis 1, God's second act of creation is to create the sky, bringing order by separating the water above from the water below. And in the book of Job, at chapter 41, the sea is where Leviathan, the great and terrifying sea monster, lives.

Where is God in the midst of the storm? When all around us seems to be confusion, chaos, and uncertainty? When it seems that we will be covered over by the deluge of water; by the forces of chaos; by the monsters that live in the deep.

Where is God when your church is going through a hard season, with less people attending church than ever before?

Where was God when the Diocese had to find funds to pay to the bank, and money to pay survivors of sexual abuse?

Where is God when you are experiencing awful drought, or flood; or the struggle which it can be just getting older, or dealing with illness?

## 2. Background - where are we up to in Acts?

We've skipped ahead a few chapters in our journey through the book of Acts – but let's just notice where we are up to.

- Through Paul's missionary journeys, the gospel has continued to go out – no matter what the obstacles; no matter the opposition; the gospel continues to go out like a tide that can't be stopped.
- In chapter 17, in Athens, Paul told the Athenians that the unknown God they worshiped is in fact the God who made the world and everything in it, he is the Lord of heaven and earth
- Chapter 19 showed us that Jesus was greater than the evil spirits, and greater than the powerful business, government and religious interests in Ephesus.
- In chapters 21 to 26, we saw Paul's journey to Jerusalem, and then his arrest and trial
  - before the Sanhedrin,
  - then before the governor Felix at Caesarea,
  - then before Festus
  - then in an audience before King Agrippa
  - and finally at the end of chapter 26, King Agrippa admits that Paul is innocent – and he says to Governor Festus “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

So as Paul starts his long journey to Rome, he does so as an innocent man; a Roman citizen who should never have been treated the way he has; yet because he appealed to Caesar, he must now make the long and dangerous journey to Rome.

What on earth is happening? Where is God in the midst of this seeming chaos, this religious and legal storm? Surely, if God was in control, he would have seen that Paul was simply found innocent and allowed to go free, to continue his missionary journey, speaking to Jews and Greeks alike to tell them that the Messiah, God's promised king, has come.

## 3. The journey to Rome begins (27:1-10)

In verses 1 to 10, we see Paul on a ship from moving along from port to port on the coast of Asia.

And God in his kindness has placed him under a centurion named Julius, who we see in verse 3 treated Paul kindly, allowing Paul to go to his friends at the port of Sidon to be cared for there.

From there, they sail to Myra in Lycia (v5);

Then eventually to a place called Fair Havens near Lasea (v8).

But by now, the sailing has been so difficult that a lot of time has been lost; and so in verses 9 and 10, Paul advises them, saying

*'Sirs, I can see that the voyage will be with danger and much heavy loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.'*

Now Paul was a Pharisee, a man with deep learning in the Jewish religion; and we see elsewhere that he was a tentmaker by trade. Totally unqualified to advise sailors about safe navigation! So why would he presume to tell the centurion, the pilot of the ship and its owner how to do their jobs?

It's possible that it was just obvious, that winter was approaching and everybody knew that wild weather would be coming; but remember that Paul, in this second half of the book of Acts, has clearly been under the protection of the Holy Spirit; set aside for a special purpose; and he has been equipped by the Holy Spirit powerfully so that he was able to cast out evil spirits (16:18; 19:11-12); and healing the sick (19:11-12)

#### 4. The journey to Rome nearly ends (27:11-32)

But in 27:11-32, it seems that the journey to Rome is about to end; and end in disaster.

As a boy I used to love reading stories of adventure and danger; and these next verses really do read like a Boys Own Adventure!

- In verse 13, with a moderate sought wind blowing, it seems like they might make it;
- but in verse 14, a violent northeasterly wind rushing down on them; they can barely manage to get the ship's boat under control
- In verse 17, they took measures to run ropes right under the hull to try to hold it together!
- Next, in verse 18, they start to throw the cargo overboard

- And in the next verse (v19) they even go so far as to throw the ship's tackle overboard.
- Eventually in v 20, after many days, they gave up all hope

And at that point, Paul stands up (v 21-26) and takes charge. With calmness and authority, he says to them, in the midst of the storm "Don't worry – no one is going to die!"

You can imagine the sailors and soldiers - wanting to believe him, but also in complete disbelief – how could Paul say this, after they've spent days fighting the storm, and have given up all hope? But no, says Paul:

*<sup>22</sup> I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. <sup>23</sup> For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, <sup>24</sup> and he said, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor; and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you." <sup>25</sup> So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. <sup>26</sup> But we will have to run aground on some island.'*

What is happening here is part of God's plan. A plan which shows his power and authority and his hand over all that is happening. Way back in Acts 19:21, before Paul was arrested, before years of waiting and being tried before various authorities, and before being sent to Rome as a prisoner, Luke records for us that Paul had decided to go to Jerusalem; and that after that, he said "I must visit Rome also." And clearly, this is not just Paul's wild idea; no, this is part of God's plan. And God won't let any storms or foolish decisions by sailors to get in the way.

And so eventually, in verse 41, which we didn't read, Paul's prophecy comes true; they run aground. And at that point the soldiers planned to kill the prisoners so that they could not escape – any Roman soldier who let a prisoner escape would be punished with their own death – but again, God, in his kindness, has the centurion intervene and prevent them from carrying out their plan (v 43).

And so, as Paul predicted, all make it safely to shore. Beaten, battered and bruised, but alive.

#### 5. Is it well with your soul?

Where is God in the midst of the storm?

Horatio Spafford was a prominent Chicago lawyer. He was a wealthy man and invested heavily in real estate in Chicago in the spring of 1871. By autumn of that same year, the Great Fire of Chicago had destroyed most of his investments; and most tragically also resulted in the death of his 4 year old son. His business interests were hit again in an economic downturn in 1873. That same year, he was to travel to England with his family, but then decided to send the family ahead. In yet another tragedy, the ship sank – Horatio Spafford’s wife Anna survived – but all four of their daughters were killed.

After such great loss, in 1876, Horatio Spafford wrote these words:

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know<sup>[a]</sup>  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

“It Is Well With My Soul”, Horatio Spafford, composed by Phillip Bliss  
*Gospel Hymns No. 2* by Ira Sankey and Phillip Bliss (1876)

Where is God in the midst of the storm?

God is Lord over all – Psalm 46 tells us that

*God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present<sup>[a]</sup> help in trouble.*

<sup>2</sup> *Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;*

<sup>3</sup> *though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.*

Notice that Psalm 46 – and our passage today – don’t promise a pain-free life; or an easy path; instead we see that because God is in the midst of the storm, we do not need to be afraid. God is sovereign over all things; he is right there in the midst of the storm, and we can trust in him.

We see this most powerfully in Jesus, God become man, who calms the wind and the waves with just a word; Jesus, who exercises such authority over creation that he walked on the water.

Jesus, who by dying on the cross for us, and rising to new life, shows that he can bring us through that final storm of our own death. Because at the end of the day - there's not much point weathering all the storms of life which we talked about before – whether drought, poverty, old age or ill health – if we have no way through that final storm which is coming for all of us.

And so just as God was faithful to his promise to Paul, so that every life on that ship was spared; so God will be faithful to us if we put our trust in Jesus.

Just as through all of the book of Acts we see that the gospel continues to go out, impacting lives powerfully, bringing many to repentance and transforming them into a new creation; so the good news of Jesus as Lord of all will continue to go out through the faithful in this Diocese, as we Share Jesus for Life. God is there in the midst of the storm.

And God will be faithful to us on that last day: he has promised that all who trust in his Son will come through the storm of death to eternal life with him. So trust in him, and in his Son.