

Acts 27:1-44
"Take Heart"
June 23, 2019
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If you are a guest this morning my name is Paden Rourk and I am the administrative deacon here at Anthem.

If you are a member you most likely are aware that we, we being myself, my wife Devan, along with the elders, have been on a journey discerning whether or not the role of pastor/elder is a calling God has placed on my life. As a part of that discernment process I am occasionally asked to preach.

I'm reminding you of that to continue to pray for discernment and godly wisdom for everyone involved in that process. If you know me you know that serving in this way on a Sunday I find challenging, and sometimes even terrifying.

What we will see in this morning's text is that it is in those challenging moments or discouraging seasons that God help us grow in our faith.

Before we begin Acts 27 let's have a quick review:

Paul was arrested in Jerusalem on false charges and ultimately transferred to Caesarea where he stands before Felix the Governor to give his defense. After two years in prison, Paul makes his appeal, as a Roman citizen, to make a defense before Caesar. Before Paul's Rome transfer arrangements are he meets with King Agrippa who recognized Paul could have been set free had he not made an appeal to defend himself before Caesar.

This brings us to Acts 27 where Paul begins his journey to Rome to make his defense before Caesar.

This morning's sermon is structured in three parts:

1. God's Plan: Setting Sail
2. God's Process: Stormy Sea
3. God's Protection: Secure Shipwreck

I. God's Plan: Setting Sail (27:1-12)

(V1-2) Paul's Departure

Acts 27:1-2

And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.

The time has come. Paul is finally setting sail for Rome. The city he has longed to visit. We heard his cry this morning through the Scripture reading from Romans 1. In some manner of speaking Paul's travel to Rome is the Lord granting him the desire of his heart to proclaim the gospel in Rome. Although I imagine this was not how Paul would have planned it, but such is the life of the Christian. God moves in mysterious ways.

Paul is not traveling alone on the journey to Rome. Besides crew and Julius, the centurion guard, and the other prisoners, Paul is accompanied by Luke, the author of Acts, as well as another brother in Christ, Aristarchus. This is not the first we are learning of Aristarchus. Aristarchus was with Paul in Acts 19 where he was dragged into the theatre at the riot in Ephesus. He was also with Paul in Acts 20 in Paul's travel to Jerusalem. Paul writes of him as his fellow prisoner in his letter to the Colossians and also as a fellow worker in his letter to Philemon. It is safe to say Aristarchus and Paul were good friends and partners in ministry.

Paul, Luke and Aristarchus set sail from Caesarea on a ship registered from Adramyttium, which was a seaport in the northwest of Asia, or modern day Turkey. They join this ship on its return voyage in search of finding another ship that is destined for Italy.

(V3) Paul's Friends

Acts 27:3

The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.

After departing, their first stop is in Sidon. Through the visits of Jesus to the region of Tyre and Sidon and the spread of the gospel following pentecost it is fairly safe to say the friends Paul was allowed to visit were Christian brothers and sisters.

Julius the centurion was treating Paul very kindly. The Greek word translated kindly is where we get our word "philanthropy." He was treating Paul with a special kind of humanity that he probably was not extending to the other prisoners. It's reasonably possible Julius was made aware of Paul's situation. Paul was a Roman citizen who was innocent and would have been set free had he not made a plea to stand before Caesar. We can't be sure that was the motivation of Julius, but nonetheless Paul received special favor from the centurion.

Paul made a visit to his Christian brothers and sisters to receive care. It's unclear what exactly this care was for. Paul has been in prison for two-plus years at this point and is understandably due for some special attention. He was probably dirty, hungry, sick, sore, or possibly injured. Although we can easily look at Paul as some kind of super hero he also probably needed some spiritual care for his upcoming journey. There was no one better to encourage Paul's spirit for the journey ahead than his fellow Christians.

Acts 27:3 is a good example of the importance of Christian community. We cannot live the life God has called us too, and the life Christ died for, alone. We obviously need the Holy Spirit, but we also need the fellowship of believers to encourage us in our faith.

Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

We are to be an encouragement to one another. I encourage you; you and encourage me. The Christian community Christ has called us to is not a one way street. We need to stay engaged and that means more than occupying a seat on Sunday morning. It means putting in some real time and effort. The importance of Christian community can not be overstated.

Hebrews 3:12-14

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Perseverance in our faith is a mark of a Christian and Christian community was designed by God as a means to protect us from sin and to help us to persevere in our faith. It is a blessing that we should be seeking out, not running away from. We need you.

Ephesians 4:15-16

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love

Every member of the body of Christ is needed for the body of Christ to grow. If you are not engaging as you should then you are not only doing yourself a disservice, but you are also not serving your brothers and sisters. It takes a village.

(V4-12) Paul's Experience

Acts 27:4-12

And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea. Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

Their journey takes them to Myra where they found a ship registered in Alexandria that was setting sail for Italy. Departing from Myra they encountered some difficult sailing conditions that ultimately did not allow them to take the path they had originally intended. They took a detour under the lee of Crete allowing the island to protect them a little bit from the wind. Arriving in Fair Havens they have a decision to make.

Should they stop here in Fair Havens for the winter until sailing conditions improve in the spring? Or should they continue on the journey in spite of the weather conditions.

Luke notes that by the time they arrive in Fair Havens the Fast, or Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), had already passed. The Day of Atonement is described in Leviticus 16 as being in the 7th month on the 10 day of the month. When you match up the Jewish calendar with our calendar the Day of Atonement falls in late September or early October.

Sailing conditions in the mediterranean quickly begin to deteriorate during this time. Knowing an important decision is to be made Paul speaks up. He believes that if they continue their voyage as planned they are going to incur some serious loss that could include the ships cargo, the ship itself, and maybe even the lives of people on board.

Through reading the text it feels like Paul is speaking more practically than prophetically in this moment. It doesn't appear that Paul received a divine warning of the storm that was about to come and that is why he is speaking. I believe it is more likely that through his own personal experiences of sailing and what just transpired from Myra to Fair Havens he realizes they are entering the beginning of storm season. If they continue sailing and storm season hits then they are putting themselves at risk of losing cargo, the ship, or even lives.

Julius, the centurion, listens to Paul's advice on the matter but was ultimately persuaded by the ship's pilot and owner (captain). Fair Havens wasn't the best place to spend winter in. It provided some protection from the elements, but not as much as Phoenix would have which is where they ultimately decide to set sail.

We transition from God's plan to God's process (stormy sea).

II. God's Process: Stormy Seas (27:13-38)

(V13-20) Paul's Hope

Acts 27:13-20

Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

Having decided to sail to Phoenix the crew waited for the right sailing conditions. There was south wind that began to gently blow and it appeared they were getting exactly what they wanted to make it to Phoenix to spend the winter.

Just when they thought they were in the clear a strong and stormy wind picked up which forced them to give way to the wind and were driven along off-course and away from Phoenix. The word translated tempestuous is the Greek word where we get our English word Typhoon. These are hurricane type winds they are dealing with.

They continue to sail under the Lee of Claude in an attempt to find some refuge from the wind. They found little rest doing so but are able to secure the ships lifeboat after a difficult struggle.

After securing the lifeboat they are met with another challenge; trying to avoid the Syrtis. Syrtis is referring to a couple of sandbanks in the Mediterranean off the coast of Africa. There is the Syrtis Major that lies off of the coast of Libya and Syrtis Minor that lies off of the coast of Tunisia. These sandbanks were dangerous for ships and were avoided at all cost. To avoid these sandbanks the crew lowered the gear, which could either be lowering the main sail or dropping a sea-anchor that would act as a brake. Either way they were doing whatever they could to slow this ship down.

Being from Kansas this text was a little intimidating. This passage of Scripture is well known for its detailed nautical description and is used by archeologist in better understanding how the ancients sailed. Much of this was new to me and I never understood why people threw cargo overboard in situations such as this. Apparently is method of trying to stabilize a ship.

On the third day of the storm they began to throw over what is translated the ship's tackle. This could refer to a variety of things including gear on the ship, ship furniture, or even the personal belongs on board. The storm they were facing was no joke and they are trying everything they can think of to manage the situation.

Which is why Luke writes what he does in verse 20, "When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned."

The storm was not letting up. For many days they saw neither sun nor stars. They were unable to navigate this ship even a little bit. The storm was resilient. It gave them no breaks or times of rest. This storm had taken away any hope of them being rescued.

Despite their best efforts the situation hadn't changed. They were facing a raging storm with no end in site. The actions they took only got them so far, but throwing cargo overboard or dropping a sea-anchor won't make the storm go away.

God is sovereign over all things, including this storm. God sovereignly controlled the storm with Jonah. He controlled the storm on the Sea of Galilee with the disciples; and the same God controls the storm here in Acts 27. God told Paul that he will make it to Rome and testify before Caesar, and God chooses to take him there through probably the biggest storm he has ever experienced. Why?

Isaiah 55:8

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God has a plan and a process. Whatever storm or trial that you are dealing with has purpose, meaning and value and it a key part of God's plan and process to sanctify you in making you holy.

Remember God did not say that you would never go through the valley of the shadow of death, but he did say He would go with you. Trust in God's plan and His process.

(V21-26) Paul's Encouragement

Acts 27:21-26

Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island."

Facing what feels like sure death Paul stands up and speaks. He starts off by basically saying "I told you so." However, his intention is not to bring shame or guilt to the ship's crew, but to establish his authority for what he is about to say next.

He is saying in spite of the storm we are in the middle of and in spite of throwing everything we possibly could into the sea, take heart; be of good cheer; keep up the courage.

But why Paul? What remains to lift our spirits? Our fate appears to be nothing short of death. We have tried everything we can to save ourselves, but our situation has not changed.

The saying goes, "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than one's fear."

For Paul, and for us as Christians that something else is our faith and hope in Jesus Christ, and that is what Paul tells them.

Paul tells them that only the ship will suffer loss and that no lives on this ship will be lost. He then gives the reason for his confidence and courage. It's not himself. Paul has no special power or skill to sail them out of this storm or to make the storm go away, but he belongs to the One who can.

That same night, when all hope appears to be lost, Paul receives a vision from an angel of God reminding him that God's will is for him to stand before Caesar in Rome. God originally told him this in Acts 23:11 and tells Paul nothing has changed. The angel also adds that God will also spare the lives of all those who are traveling with Paul.

Paul tells them a second time, take heart; be of good cheer; keep up the courage, for I believe my God will do what he says. This ship won't survive, but we will, for God has declared it so.

Paul's courage, born out of faith and hope in Christ, isn't from having knowledge of God. His courage is in that God knows him. Paul belongs to God. He has been set apart and called out of the world and into an intimate relationship with his Creator. His confidence is set on nothing else than Jesus Christ.

Where is your hope? Where is your courage? Are you trusting in your own power? Are you trying to control things or situations you can't control? Are you trying to save yourself through works and knowledge?

I pray the love and grace of Jesus Christ be poured out into each of our hearts this morning, that we may all come to trust and believe in Him in all circumstances.

(V27-32) Paul's Discernment

Acts 27:27-32

When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.

They are now two weeks sailing in this storm. The text says they were being driven across the Adriatic Sea. The Adriatic Sea is more than the sea along the eastern coast of Italy, but also includes the open waters of the Mediterranean to the southeast of Italy, to the sea that lay between Malta, Italy, Greece, and Crete.

At midnight, on the fourteenth night of the storm, the sailors suspect they are close to land. It's most likely they were close enough to land to hear the waves hitting the shore. To test their hypothesis they begin taking measurements of how far they are from the bottom of the sea.

The first measurement was 20 fathoms (120ft). They measure again some time later and get 15 fathoms (90ft). Fearing that if they kept moving at the rate they were going they would soon shipwreck on the rocks in the middle of the night. To avoid this they let down the anchors from the stern, that is the back of the boat, and prayed for day to come.

Knowing land was near the crew comes up with an idea. They say they are also going to let down the anchors from the bow, but really they are going to get loosen the lifeboat and make their way towards shore.

Paul discerns their plan and notifies Julius the centurion and the soldiers. Instead of just stopping them and pulling the lifeboat back up to be used later, the soldiers cut the ropes to the lifeboat and remove all temptation, guaranteeing that everyone would stay together.

The sailors job was not done. They still needed to get everyone else to shore. God had promised that everyone would live and part of God's plan was for the sailors to stay on the ship to help get everyone else to shore. The prisoners and soldiers would have been ill equipped to continue sailing without the crew. To ensure everyone's safety they all needed to stay together. (V33-38) Paul's Breakfast

Acts 27:33-38

As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. 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." And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

They have been in a hurricane type storm for two weeks. During those two weeks they haven't eaten. I imagine being tossed to and fro by such a large storm for two weeks straight most likely made them sea-sick and not exactly hungry.

They now know they are close to land and can see an end to their misery. At this point Paul speaks up again to encourage everyone aboard to take some food for nourishment, for they are going to need it if they are going to make it to land.

After they got their fill they threw off what food remained to lighten the ship to get them as close as they could to land.

By this point in time Paul has established himself as a leader on this ship. He reminds them again of God's promise to protect them. The saying "not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you" is proverb to remind them of God's promise to keep them all safe and secure. He will bring them all safely to land and ultimately safely to Rome.

This leads us to third phase of this journey.

III. God's Protection: Secure Shipwreck (27:39-44)

(V39-43a) Paul's Deliverance

Acts 27:39-43a

Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan.

When I first read, "they did not recognize the land," I thought it may have been Luke trying to be funny. They did spend two weeks on the open sea in the middle of a storm. Perhaps they had forgotten what land looked like.

What Luke is probably saying is that none of them had seen this land before. It appears none of them have traveled either to this island, or at least this part of the island. They were in unfamiliar territory.

In order to reach land they needed to sail a little further. They cut off the anchors and loosened the ropes on the rudder allowing them to steer, and raised the foresail to the wind to reach shore.

They didn't quite make it to shore, but instead ran the ship into a reef where it remained stuck. The front of the boat was hung up on the reef, and the back of the boat was being beaten by the waves and beginning to break apart. With the lifeboat being cut off there was only one way to make it to shore, swim.

The soldiers grew fearful that if they had to swim some of the prisoners may escape. For a soldier guarding a prisoner this is a valid fear. If the prisoner were to escape there is a decent chance you will die for allowing the prisoner to escape.

However, before the soldiers could begin to act, Julius, the centurion, puts a stop to it. Julius desired to save Paul and the other prisoners are spared as well.

(V43b-44) Paul's Safety

Acts 27:43b-44

He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

Those who could swim were told to go first in order to be available to assist those who couldn't. For those who couldn't swim they had to slowly work their way toward the shore using pieces of the ship. In so doing, all 276 of them were brought safely to land.

Simply put, God's word was fulfilled.

CONCLUSION (Application)

1. Engage God's community

The first few verses of chapter 27 shows us two examples of Christian community.

Luke and Aristarchus traveled with Paul to Jerusalem. We know Paul spent two years in a prison in Caesarea which means that Luke and Aristarchus most likely spent those two years in close proximity to him awaiting either his release or direction on where they were going to go with him next. What an example of both commitment and sacrifice for a friend.

Paul also receives care from the Christian community in Sidon. He is probably physically weak and also in need of spiritual encouragement for the journey ahead. Who better to care for him in those things than brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul says it in verse 23 that he belongs to God. Paul also writes in Romans 8 that if we are indeed children of God, meaning God has adopted us and brought us into faith in Christ Jesus, then we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. We have an inheritance. This is not just a future inheritance of a heavenly body and a future glory spent with Christ in eternity, but there are benefits of this inheritance we get to enjoy now.

The Church is the bride of Christ and Christ's inheritance. We get to share in that and ought to enjoy it to the glory of Christ.

If you are not living in Christian community and are just hovering around it I encourage you to engage. Engagement is more than showing up. It's actually getting involved and humbly caring for one another and also humbling yourself enough to receive care.

Living in Christian community is more than showing up to a Sunday gathering. It is more than showing up to your weekly Gospel Community gathering. Let's remember Hebrews 3:13, "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Exhort one another daily to protect one another from sin. Christian community is day-in and day-out. It is all day every day, but we can't do this on our own. We need divine assistance.

Which leads us to our second application....

2. Engage God's Word

In 2 Timothy 3, Paul writes, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

An important part of what is contained in Scripture are promises of God. He has promised things to help equip us and encourage us to fulfill his mission.

There are at least two promises made by God in this chapter. His first promise is that Paul will make it to Rome and stand trial. Next week we will see that Paul does indeed make it to Rome and it is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4 that Paul does indeed stand trial.

The second promise is that God will protect the lives of everyone on the ship. He keeps his promises. His word does not come back to him void.

Paul's encouragement on the ship in the middle of a storm was not in his own power, or in the power of the crew to save him. His trust, faith, and hope were in God's Word.

Here are three promises we can hold on to when we need encouragement:

Hebrews 13:5

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

The promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" is an important promise to cling to in difficult circumstances.

Philippians 1:6

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

What God started he will bring to completion. Whatever difficulty you are experiencing for the purpose of your sanctification will be made complete when Christ returns.

Luke 12:40

You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

The promise of Christ’s return must never be forgotten.

The Bible we hold is the very word of God, written by man, empowered by the Holy Spirit. These words God spoke so that we can have everything we need to engage God’s mission. Which is our third application...

3. Engage God’s mission

We should be reminded of Acts 1:8 when we read of Paul in the middle of a hurricane type storm on the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

Acts 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Even as a prisoner on a ship in the middle of a storm in the middle of nowhere Paul does not miss an opportunity to proclaim the power of God.

Even after being shipwrecked on an island to which no one on the ship had probably visited, Paul engages the local community and heals the sick. More on that next week.

Wherever Paul goes he takes the gospel with him. The same is true for us. Wherever we go, to work, to the gym, to the grocery store, to the doctor, on a walk in your neighborhood, wherever you go, the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead goes with you.

Be encouraged Anthem. Take heart, be of good cheer, keep up the courage, for no matter what situation lies before you, your God, your Creator, your Savior, your friend, is with you.

One last word of encouragement from Paul in 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 1:3-10

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.