

Scripture Reading:

Acts 27:20 “Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up. **21** But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. **22** And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. **23** For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, **24** saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ **25** Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. **26** However, we must run aground on a certain island.” **27** Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land. **28** And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms. **29** Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come. **30** And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, **31** Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” **32** Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off. **33** And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. **34** Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you.” **35** And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat. **36** Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. **37** And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. **38** So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea. **39** When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible. **40** And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore. **41** But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves. **42** And the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. **43** But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, **44** and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.”

Acts 28:1 “ Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta.”

"The Ship Wreck at Malta"

After weeks at sea we now have the Apostle Paul and his companions involved in a violent shipwreck on the Island of Malta.

- This morning we will study another detailed account at sea given by Luke in his orderly account
- I trust that we will also learn more about how we are to minister grace to the world around us, in the same way that God has ministered grace to us as His children.
- Last week we saw the Apostle Paul bring the good news that the lives of all those on this ship were to be saved.
- They were in the midst of suffering the consequences of their sin, but they would now know the mercy of God!

In this morning's text Luke informs us that 276 souls were on this large vessel that was bringing a load of wheat from Egypt to Rome, along with the various prisoners who came on board with Julius, the Roman Centurion at Myra. As we look at Luke's account this morning we know there are sailors, soldiers and prisoners among this 276 but we are not told how many of each.

- During this tragic voyage, we see the Apostle Paul, along with Luke & Aristarchus, ministering to the soldiers & sailors despite their showing little interest in helping them!

The Apostle Paul reminded the Saints at Rome that "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." As Christians we are to live out our faith by loving the unlovable because God loved us when we were unlovable. The Apostle John talks about how this should appear in very practical ways in the fourth chapter of his 1st letter:

"7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

- We see such loving actions in this final leg of the journey with the Apostle Paul being the one who brings these men good news and leads the way to safety for ALL those on board, even the unlovable.

Paul does not love and serve these men because they have loved and served him, he does so as one who remembers that God first loved him when he was an enemy of the Church!

- As we review this account, I pray that we learn how to better interact with and serve unbelievers who God puts in our path today.
- Remembering the lesson of Jonah: While there are certainly consequences of sin in this life, we must never be surprised to see the mercy of God manifested as well!

So with that in mind, let's consider the details of the shipwreck itself. Paul has been assured by God again that he will testify before Caesar AND God has given him ALL the lives of those on board as well: God's mercy!

- This does not mean that Paul just sits back and waits to see how God will work things out!

This is the charge that is often brought against those of us who believe in God's sovereign control of all things:

- They ask: What difference will our actions make if God has already determined what is going to happen?
- The reality is that our moral choices are all part of God's plans and that He holds us responsible for OUR actions. Our actions, be they obedient or disobedient actions are often the means by which God accomplishes His ends!
- One good example of this is when we claim the promises of God for our children and have them baptized as infants.

We don't then presume that all is well because God is in control...

- Rather we begin the long journey of raising them in the fear and admonition of the Lord, believing God's many promises!

Another example is when a young couple takes their marriage vows...

- They do not then sit back and just bask in the joys of marriage, they begin a life-long journey of learning to love one another more and more.

Paul understands that God uses means to carry out His predestined plans and here he knows that he will be a leader among the sailors & soldiers as they carry out their vocational work...

- And he understands that even these pagan soldiers and sailors will be held responsible for their actions!

Paul has said they would run aground on an island and in verse 27 we read:

“27 Now when the 14th night had come, as we were driven up & down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land.”

- How did they know they were near land when it was midnight? *[help the children understand this]*

So the sailors do their job, attending to what needs to be done when you suspect your ship is approaching land in the dark...

28 “And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms [about 120 feet]; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms. [about 90 feet]

- Crashing into an island in the dark during a storm is NOT a good idea, so again the sailors do their job.

29 “Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come.”

These sailors were not Christian men, but as the old saying goes, ‘there are no atheists in the foxhole.’ Some may simply have wished for the dawn, as the King James would indicate, others may have lifted up prayers to pagan gods and some may well have lifted up prayers to the God who Paul served.

- Only God knows the heart!

However, we also see these men quickly looking out for themselves alone...

30 “And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, 31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.”

- Paul continues to show leadership by paying attention to what is going on and alerting the Roman Centurion to the danger for his men.

Again, Paul does not sit in his cabin, confident that God would deliver them all safely to some island: His leadership is another means that God uses for His end.

- Paul then brings the message of hope and encourages those on board to take time to eat a good meal!

33 “And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. 34 Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you.”

- This food will bring the needed strength for the final leg of this disastrous journey.
- Paul then leads with his good example...

35 “And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat. 36 Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. 37 And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship.”

In verse 38 we read, “So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.”

- These sailors continue to do their work, with the assistance of others on board, by preparing to beach the ship safely on this island.
- God uses even these pagans to accomplish His ends...

39 “When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible.”

- The Island of Malta was not in the major shipping lanes and so it was unfamiliar to these men: But they quickly survey the coastline and pick what they think will be the best place to beach the ship.
- They then use their skill as sailors to begin the final approach...

40 “And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind & made for shore.”

- They cut loose the four anchors they had let out during the night and quickly drop the side rudders that would allow them to try & steer the ship & put up one of the smaller sails to bring them into shore.
- However, God had just one more challenge for them to face...

41 “But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.”

Dealing with an unknown island and bay, they ran aground on a submerged sandbar and the ship was now stuck!

- It would soon be torn apart by the waves crashing against the rear of the ship.
- Now it is the soldiers turn to demonstrate the depravity of man...

42 “And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.”

- Better that all the prisoners die than have even one escape because of the severity of Roman Law!
- Again we see the impact that Paul has had on Julius with yet another Roman Centurion coming to the aid of God's people!

43 “But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, 44 and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.”

- God has kept His promise to the Apostle Paul...
- ALL those on board have been brought to safety and only the ship and cargo was lost.
- While most point to the strong leadership of the Apostle Paul in this situation, we have also seen how God used these pagan sailors and soldiers to His end as well.
- We not told by Luke that any of these men, or even Julius, were converted, but I suspect that we will see many of them in heaven!

Many of these men were certainly ‘bad actors’ in this story with their desire to escape leaving the others behind or trying to kill the prisoners...

- But just as the thief on the cross who was saved began his crucifixion by mocking Jesus, we can hope these men joined him in repentance when they saw the confidence of Paul along with the power of the faithful God he served.

Steve and Mike will bring messages from this pulpit over the next two weeks and then we will study Paul's visit to the island called Malta. That will bring us to Rome and the climax of the Book of Acts, which we will spend a few weeks studying. My plan, Lord willing, is to then have five Sundays where we can again review the elements of our Covenant Renewal worship before the season of Advent and Christmas. Reviewing how and why we worship the way we do is something I like to do occasionally to refresh all of us and to be sure that our covenant children understand more & more about what we do each Lord's Day as they grow older.

Perhaps having this on my mind helped me to see a similar pattern in how the Apostle Paul ministered to these Gentiles on this ship. We are commanded to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. These are the great commandments that we celebrate here in worship and that we practice as we are commissioned to serve in the world wherever God has placed us. What I think we see here in Acts is a pattern of service by the Apostle Paul that is very similar to how God ministers to us here in worship each week, and that really should not surprise us.

Some have thought that Paul's giving thanks for the bread and having them all partake together was some sort of communion: But we know that Paul would not have administered the Lord's Table to pagans because it would not have been a blessing for them, but rather a judgment.

BUT I do think we can see Paul ministering to these men: In verse 21 we see Paul standing in the midst of them, having gathered them together, just as God calls us together for worship. Paul reminds them that they should have listened to him, which as we learned last week was not a tactless "I told you so."

- In fact, I think we can see this as a sort of call to confession.

Paul then announces the Good News that all lives on board will be spared! This Good News is not wishful thinking on the part of Paul...

- Any more than Theron or Mike's declaration regarding the Good News of the Gospel each week is something that they just hope is true.

Paul tells them to believe God and then begins to give them instructions about how they are to be strengthened for the challenges ahead and then they do have a meal together:

- NOT the Lord's Supper, but certainly a reminder of how the Supper pictures the strength we need in this life through the common practice of eating a meal.

You could even see how the final step is Paul's commissioning these men to leave behind their selfish ways and do the work that needed to be done to beach the ship and save all those on board.

Now I think this is more than just a clever insight on my part, but truly a pattern that we should see for all of the life we are commissioned to live!

- We are commanded to go unto all the earth calling sinners to repentance.

We are to gather with people wherever God has placed us and help them to see that they should have listened to God!

This could be a home-maker talking with a neighbor or friend or an evangelist talking to tens of thousands but the principle is the same.

- We are to give them the instructions they need which could be a simple presentation of the Gospel or inviting them to Church or even just giving practical help in a situation their sin has gotten them into such as Paul did with these soldiers & sailors.
- We are to provide practical help where it is needed which could be a simple hug or meal or some financial help or other practical assistance.

- Just as God feeds us at this Table each week, we are to feed those in need around us in practical ways!

And obviously, just as Paul caused these men to leave their selfish ways and work toward the greater good, so we must encourage the lost to repent and come with us as we follow Jesus!

- How all of this is worked out in the real world is as unique as each of our individual lives!

Some of our opportunities may come from wise decisions we have made that put us in the right place at the right time, and others may come as the result of bad decisions by others...

- Remember, Paul did not choose to sail off into this storm!

And of course, God can use us even in the tough spots we may find ourselves that come about as a result of our own BAD choices!

Psalm 51 is my personal favorite where I have found great comfort during my Christian walk, as have many thousands or tens of thousands down through Church history...

- And yet this Psalm was written as a result of some VERY bad actions on the part of King David.

As Jesus told His disciples, the storms will come on the just and the unjust alike and we know from Scriptures that storms can be of our own making or the result of bad actions on the part of others...

To survive the storms we need to be sure we are on the Rock:

- Knowing, hearing & obeying Jesus!

Then no matter what we face, in the end we can proclaim what King David did at the end of his greatest storm...

“11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.”

Communion Meditation: Psalm 23

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.”