

Sermon on **Acts 27:13-26** for 5th weekend after Pentecost
St. Paul's Lutheran Church – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

What if the storm doesn't stop? We have been getting breaks between absolute downpours, but they keep coming. What if the storm kept going? We'll have water in all of our basements. We'll be sandbagging down by the river. The crops will be washed out, and the list goes on. Could it get so bad that we "*finally give up all hope?*" It happened to Roman soldiers and some sailors as they tried to sail from Crete towards Rome to deliver a special prisoner, the Apostle Paul. For fourteen days they were driven along by a typhoon. They thought all was lost and gave up hope. In that storm Paul gave a lesson for them, you and me.

God knows what he is doing in the storm.

1) Remember who you are.

2) Believe God and his promises and stand and serve.

Acts 27:13-26 When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called a Northeaster, swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. As we passed by the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. 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 the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.

Paul had warned them before they set sail that it was too late in the season. Trying to make it to the next place would only incur loss of cargo and lives. But what does a prisoner know? The captain said to set sail. Once they got out of the safety of the harbor, a storm came down the heights of the island of Crete and pushed them out to sea. Experienced sailors made all the maneuvers they could. Yet with each effort they made, and each day that passed, they became more anxious, exhausted, and afraid. After more than 10 days of not being able to see the sun or even a star to help navigate or know where they might be, they lost all hope.

A friend once told me, "Sometimes God loves us enough to let the pot boil over." All of our best laid plans, all of our strength, training and performance to help ourselves all comes to naught. And we are tempted to get down, despair and even lose hope. I haven't been in too many storms out on the open water, but I don't always like to remember the thoughts I've had in those moments I was in the storms of life, because they sound downright sinful, doubting, feeble, and even faithless. Maybe you are the same. Like Job, who suffered more terribly than I could ever imagine – lost his kids, his wife's support, and all his possessions, even his own health, do I call out to God for a judicial hearing? I demand to know exactly why God is letting me go through all this when I try so hard to please him? It's because deep down inside I think I know better than God. Like days I thought I was smarter than my boss, or than the worker next to me, I treat God like that. "God, I know better." What blasphemy! Or like the disciples who were so terrified at sea that they woke Jesus from his slumber in the back of the boat and accused him of not caring. They might have taken a lesson from the peace Jesus had, but instead they accused him of not caring if they drown. They forgot who Jesus truly is and their faith faltered. Do we want something so bad we ignore the good advice or even God's Word and we go after it exhausting all our resources and efforts thinking we can do it, we can get it, life will be better when or if, but whether we achieve it or not we end up exhausted and empty? The storm sweeps down forcing us along, and we lose hope. Listen to Paul.

After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do

not be afraid.” Paul says, “I told you so,” but not in the petty or angry way we might tell our siblings, co-workers, or children. Paul says it to remind them that he has the right words, the right advice, and don’t make the same mistake twice of ignoring it. He explains to them that a miracle will happen. And why? Because of what we often forget: **God knows what he is doing in the storm.**

Paul confesses who he is, “*Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid.’*” **Remember who you are.** We are not just random people, or well-developed animals. No we are God’s amazing creation, and though we lost the image of God in the fall into sin, it has been partially restored to us when the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts, created the new self who loves God. We were baptized and made children of God. We belong to him. Our life is not our own. “*God to whom I belong and whom I serve,*” is there any better explanation?

How can we be confident and unafraid when the storms come and take life, possessions and the like? **Remember who you are:** You are a blood bought, heaven bound, forgiven children of God. The Son of God came to save you. The one who calmed the wind and the waves with just a couple words, pronounced that our salvation was complete and our sins were really paid for with just one word from the cross – *tetelesthai*, “*It is finished.*” Man’s corruption and the devil’s rage stormed all around him, and his body was laid in a tomb. But three days later Jesus rose from that grave calming the storm of our doubt and our fears and our guilt and our shame. When the storms rage and you are exhausted and feel empty, **remember who you are**, remember **God knows what he is doing in the storm.**

Then **Believe God and his promises. Stand and Serve.** I once heard that in early Christianity when plagues would sweep across the Roman empire, while many would flee and leave behind the sick and dying, many Christians stayed to care for them and help them. How could they be so loving and fearless to do such things? In Luther’s day when the bubonic plague swept through Wittenberg and many left to a different city Luther stayed to care for the sick at great personal cost to himself. He summed it up this way in a letter where he calls out the devil’s attempts to scare us, to make us anxious and fearful, “First of all, I know that helping my neighbor is something that is very pleasing to God and all the angels; by doing so, I am doing God’s will and offering true service and obedience to him...No, you’ll not have the last word! If Christ shed his blood for me and died for me, why should I not expose myself to some small dangers for his sake and disregard this weak plague? If you can terrorize, Christ can strengthen me. If you can kill, Christ can give life. If you have poison in your fangs, Christ has far greater medicine....Here is Christ and here am I, his servant in this work. Let Christ prevail! Amen” (*How Should a Christian Act During a Deadly Epidemic?* By Martin Luther).

Paul knew the ship would be lost. But he knew God’s promise that they would live. He trusted God. The ship was lost, but they all survived. This wasn’t the end of difficulties or the end of his being a prisoner, but it was just one more opportunity for Paul to **stand and serve** and for the world to see what it means to know and have a Savior from sin.

You are forgiven in Christ. Your life is not your own, you were bought at a price. You have good godly work to do every day, not just when plagues come or ships are about to go down. When you are at home – look at your phone less, and show love, patience, kindness, self-control with family and friends and your relationships. When you are at school, use the time wisely – do what is asked of you, show respect, take in everything you learn in light of God’s Word and be willing to help. When you are at work, remember you are ultimately serving the Lord as you help and serve your neighbor through the work of your hands and your words. Do it with joy whether the task is menial or difficult. Treat your co-workers, boss, employees with respect and kindness even when they don’t treat you that way. Speak well of them. How can we do this? Because you know **God knows what he is doing in the storm. You know who you are. You Believe God and his promises. Stand and Serve.** May God use our witness in the day to day ups and downs and in the times when the ship breaks up to bring many more to the joy and peace we have in the storm because we belong to Jesus. Amen.