

6. Paul: Prayer in Time of Crisis

Question to begin

- What was your most dangerous encounter with water?
- If you could take a cruise anywhere in the world, where would you go?

The Reading: Acts of the Apostles 27

27 When it was decided that we were to sail for Italy, they transferred Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort, named Julius. ²Embarking on a ship of Adramyttium that was about to set sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. ³The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul kindly, and allowed him to go to his friends to be cared for.

⁴Putting out to sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. ⁵After we had sailed across the sea that is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia.

⁶There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy and put us on board. ⁷We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind was against us, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. ⁸Sailing past it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.

⁹Since much time had been lost and sailing was now dangerous, because even the Fast had already gone by, Paul advised them, ¹⁰saying, ‘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.’ ¹¹But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. ¹²Since the harbour was not suitable for spending the winter, the majority was in favour of putting to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, where they could spend the winter. It was a harbour of Crete, facing south-west and north-west.

The Storm at Sea

¹³When a moderate south wind began to blow, they thought they could achieve their purpose; so they weighed anchor and began to sail past Crete, close to the shore. ¹⁴But soon a violent wind, called the northeaster, rushed down from Crete. ¹⁵Since the ship was caught and could not be turned with its head to the wind, we gave way to it and were driven. ¹⁶By running under the lee of a small island called Cauda we were scarcely able to get the ship’s boat under control.

¹⁷After hoisting it up they took measures to undergird the ship; then, fearing that they would run on the Syrtis, they lowered the sea-anchor and so were driven. ¹⁸We were being pounded by the storm so violently that on the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard, ¹⁹and on the third day with their own hands they threw the ship's tackle overboard. ²⁰When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest raged, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

21 Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul then stood up among them and said, 'Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and thereby avoided this damage and loss. ²²I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, ²⁴and 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." ²⁵So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. ²⁶But we will have to run aground on some island.'

27 When the fourteenth night had come, as we were drifting across the sea of Adria, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. ²⁸So they took soundings and found twenty fathoms; a little farther on they took soundings again and found fifteen fathoms. ²⁹Fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. ³⁰But when the sailors tried to escape from the ship and had lowered the boat into the sea, on the pretext of putting out anchors from the bow, ³¹Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, 'Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.' ³²Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the boat and set it adrift.

33 Just before daybreak, Paul urged all of them to take some food, saying, 'Today is the fourteenth day that you have been in suspense and remaining without food, having eaten nothing. ³⁴Therefore I urge you to take some food, for it will help you survive; for none of you will lose a hair from your heads.' ³⁵After he had said this, he took bread; and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶Then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves. ³⁷(We were in all two hundred and seventy-six persons in the ship.) ³⁸After they had satisfied their hunger, they lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea.

The Shipwreck

39 In the morning they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned to run the ship ashore, if they could. ⁴⁰So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea. At the same time they loosened the

ropes that tied the steering-oars; then hoisting the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach. ⁴¹But striking a reef, they ran the ship aground; the bow stuck and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the force of the waves. ⁴²The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none might swim away and escape; ⁴³but the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, ⁴⁴and the rest to follow, some on planks and others on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

First Impression

Was there anything that surprised, impressed, delighted or challenged you in these readings?

Questions for Reflection

- To what degree do events fulfil Paul's dire warning in 27:10?
- Paul could easily have felt sorry for himself in the events recounted in this reading, but he seems not to show any self-pity. How would you account for this?
- Paul speaks quite directly about God's will in the situation (27:21-26). When is it appropriate to speak plainly about what God intends for a situation? When is it not appropriate?
- During the storm at sea, Paul was guided by an angel. How have you experienced God's presence and guidance in dangerous or stressful situations? What have you learned that has relevance for how you live today?
- Have you ever seen someone bring peace to people in a frightening situation? Have you ever done this? What have you learned from these experiences?
- Think of a stressful situation in your life. What did you do to stay in touch with God? How did you experience God staying in touch with you?
- Has a situation of distress or danger led you to pray? What lasting effect has this experience had on you?
- If your life is more peaceful at present, how can you take advantage of the opportunity to deepen your relationship with God?

Closing Prayer

Pray for someone or a group of people who are in a crisis.

Ask God to give them guidance, strength, help, safety – whatever it is they need – by praying Psalm 25 on their behalf:

¹ To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

² O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.

³ Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴ Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.

⁵ Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

⁶ Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.

⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

⁸ Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹ He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰ All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

¹¹ For your name's sake, O LORD,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.

¹² Who are they that fear the LORD?
He will teach them the way that they should choose.

¹³ They will abide in prosperity,
and their children shall possess the land.

¹⁴ The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,

and he makes his covenant known to them.

¹⁵ My eyes are ever towards the LORD,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

¹⁶ Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.

¹⁷ Relieve the troubles of my heart,
and bring me out of my distress.

¹⁸ Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.

¹⁹ Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.

²⁰ O guard my life, and deliver me;
do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

²¹ May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.

²² Redeem Israel, O God,
out of all its troubles.

Glory be....