

## **SERMON: “Sailing Stories: Paul’s Sea Story.”**

Rev. Geoff Ross: St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton, Sun., Aug., 20, 2017

Each of the stories of the past three weeks – Jonah’s misadventure, the storm at sea, and Peter’s test of faith (including the seven verses from Psalm 107) – is present in this story about Paul’s miraculous journey to Rome. The story follows the pattern of a sudden storm arising and threatening the lives of the now panicked sailors only to be calmed by an act of God. The sailors – and in this case soldiers – fly the flag of pagan gods and just as the sailors in the Jonah story and the disciples in the two stories about their misadventures, they fear for their lives when all their efforts fail to keep their boat from sinking. We hear of their frantic actions – they throw the cargo into the sea, they try to come about, they throw out anchors to slow their progress and hold them fast in the storm. They eventually run their boat up onto an island to keep from drowning. But this isn’t their story – at least they’re not the important characters.

Neither is this a story of a reluctant prophet like Jonah. Nor is this a story of a Messiah determined to teach His disciples about the power of faith. At the center of this story we have a depiction of a man of profound faith and ability. Like Jesus – and in a way, Jonah – Paul is with God; and, as such is unafraid of the storm even as it threatens to sink the boat. Unlike Jonah, Paul isn’t running away from his calling – he’s evangelizing to anyone who’ll listen even though he’s a prisoner on his way to Rome to face trial. And in many ways, Paul takes Jesus’ message of salvation and redemption one step further since Paul can testify to God’s saving work in him – because he’s a living, breathing example of what God’s Gospel can do for each of us.

Paul, having come to faith in Jesus Christ as he did – through a conversion that was both total and intense on the road to Damascus – and having assumed the role of traveling preacher and Church builder, acts like a man who knows what God has planned for him – and who knows that a shipwreck is not part of God’s plan for him. Paul acts with a confidence that comes from his faith. He is doing God’s work and believes that God will provide all that he needs. And this confidence does not go unnoticed by the Centurion assigned to guard him. In the example of Paul we have a model for ourselves in our lives and world today: we too don’t have to be afraid: being with God/having God with us gives us the confidence and hope to live and act out lives despite the dangers and crisis’ that confront us.

Our stories have come full circle: with Jonah we had a reluctant prophet who petulantly refused to follow God’s will – only to have God work through him anyway. In the two sailing stories the disciples were well intentioned but were unable to move beyond their limited fearful understanding of the world. In the story of Peter’s walking on the water we saw the shift, the movement from fear toward faith and the willingness to commit oneself completely. Now we see the end product: a story about a man so totally committed to Christ that even when he’s arrested and being shipped off to Rome he still takes the time to live, act, and preach the Gospel of redemption – even in the midst of

the storm he takes time/strength to enact/from the Eucharist with the “starving” sailors.

In closing, as we end this series on sailing stories, I think we should ask ourselves what God is wanting us to do – individually and collectively – with our faith. The good news is that these stories show/tell us what to do. God calls us to trust in Him and to let go and let God. God longs for us to trust in God’s rule over our lives – in His will and purpose for us and the course that God has charted for us. God wants us to have faith enough to face whatever tempests may beset us. And we can because God is with us – on board; His hand is already extended to us because of God’s love. Friends, like Paul, we have been saved through/by God’s saving action in Christ – transformed by the power of God’s grace: we are saved through/by faith alone, but not by a faith that stands alone. True salvation results in a changed life revealed in a life lived by faith. The pattern of these stories is that those saved responded by praising and giving offerings to God – and to proclaiming the wonder of His love, the Gospel for all, to all – that of our salvation through the saving act of love through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace to live lives of grace. Amen.