

Rev. Shaun Arndt
Sunday, June 23, 2024
Acts 27 13-26

Cast all your anxiety on the Lord, because he cares for you. Amen.

When the Lord doesn't calm the storm....

Dear friends in Christ,

The wind doesn't just howl, it roars. Sheets of rain and bolts of lightning crash down. The giant waves lift the boat up and then toss it down violently. Water sprays on board. Even the seasoned sailors despair. Jesus' disciples cry out urgently to the Lord.

And then the Lord speaks. He gives a powerful word in the face of the raging storm. And *the wind*, and *the waves... they... do...not... stop....* The storm keeps on raging and roaring, threatening to tear the ship to pieces!

Not what you expected, right? Did you expect the storm to suddenly stop when Jesus spoke? That *is* what happened in our Gospel lesson, when Jesus stilled the storm with His Words: **Peace, be still.**

But the storm I'm talking about is the one we hear about in our second lesson, in Acts 27, when a raging **hurricane** engulfed the Apostle Paul, the Evangelist Luke (who wrote the book of Acts) and 274 other passengers, sailors and soldiers on board that ship.

And though His people cried out in prayer, **the Lord did not calm the storm**, He let it keep on raging around them, not for a few hours, not for a few days, but that storm raged on around them for two whole weeks!

Now, before we go any further, let us clear about the storms we hear about in the Scripture lessons today. They are not picture language. They were real, actual, storms of winds and waves, the kind that still sink ships all over the world.

But we can take what we learn from these readings and apply it to not just when we go through actual bad weather, but also what we might label "storms of life" – the overwhelming troubles, sorrows and struggles we face in this fallen world: relationship problems, health or money problems, the constant flood of bad news in the world around

us, hostility toward our faith, mental health struggles – depression, anxiety and PTSD and all kinds of other stressors and sorrows that rise up over us like an insurmountable storm.

Now sometimes the Lord does exactly what we heard in the gospel lesson and saves His people *from* the storm, **He calms it**. We might be able to think of times that looming disaster rose up to frighten us in one way or another, but then just like that the Lord took the problem away. The doctor's test came back with good results, the thing we dreaded never took place.

But at other times, **the Lord doesn't calm the storm** right away, and the "storms" in our lives just keep raging on and on.

That was the case for the Apostle Paul in our lesson! Indeed, this hurricane was just a continuation of the troubles he was enduring. For two years Paul had been jailed as a result of his teaching the good news of Jesus across many countries. And now Paul was sailing to Rome not for a vacation, but as a prisoner to stand trial before the Roman emperor, who might put him to death on a whim.

The example of the Apostle Paul stands in sharp contrast to the many "health, wealth and prosperity" false teachers who lie in God's name and say if you do the right things, you won't have any troubles. God has never promised any such thing in the Bible! Instead, Jesus clearly says in John: **In this world you are going to have trouble** (John 16:33).

Paul's ship was **caught** in a real storm. Sometimes we feel **caught** too. Temptation and guilt and sinful patterns we've fallen into work hard to blow us off course into dangerous waters.

Luke wrote: **We... were driven along**. Like a ship blown out of control, sorrows and struggles can seem to push us along with no break, just one thing after another.

In fact, we might feel utterly lost and not where to turn, like ancient sailors who in a storm could not rely on the **sun and stars** to know where they were going.

And I doubt I really need to explain these words: **kept pressing down on us, finally all hope... was disappearing**. Perhaps you've been there, thinking there's no way out, maybe you're there right now.

And when it happens, aren't we tempted to wonder if the Lord doesn't care? Maybe has forgotten his promises? Perhaps He will refuse to forgive, save and help us?

But none of that is the case! Learn from what happened to Paul, how the Lord still takes care of His people even **When He doesn't calm the storm:**

Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have followed my advice and not set sail from Crete and avoided this damage and loss.

At first, this sounds like Paul is saying: "*I told you so,*" but his whole point is that he wants them to listen to what's going to say next. We could paraphrase: I knew what I was talking about then, and I know what I'm talking about now:

But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because there will be no loss of life among you. Only the ship will be lost.

You see the Lord will always rescue His people! He did so in the gospel lesson by calming the storm and saving the disciples *from the storm*. But **when the Lord doesn't calm the storm... He will rescue His own through the storm.**

That's what the Lord did here. He didn't calm the storm. He even let it destroy the ship. But He brought them safely through the storm onto the shore of Malta. Please do yourself a favor and open up your Bible and read the rest of Acts 27 and 28 to hear how God did that and brought Paul to Rome, just as the Lord promised:

In fact, 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 before Caesar. And surely God has graciously given you all those who are sailing with you.'

Even when the Lord keeps the storms coming, He does not make us face them alone. Even if we don't see them like Paul did here, God sends His angels to guard and serve His people.

And He also provides fellow believers to pray for us and remind us of the Lord's promises just as Paul did for the people on the ship. In the midst of life's storms, rely on your pastors, Christian teachers, family and friends and let them know you need them to remind you of God's promises and to pray for you.

This is yet another reason it is important for us to be together in person in worship and Bible classes and not merely online, so that we can be a community of believers to encourage each other.

And what could be more encouraging than that often-repeated phrase in the Bible that the angel spoke: **Do not be afraid, Paul.**

Do not be afraid. We hear that same message from the angels at the birth of Jesus who came to be our Savior from sin and death. **Do not be afraid** was spoken again at the empty tomb on Easter morning, when Jesus had paid for all sin on the cross and risen victorious from the dead to give us peace with God and to be by our side to help us in every trouble and trial!

When the Lord doesn't calm the storm... He calms us as He speaks to us words of comfort that He delivers to us through the promises of the Bible, your baptism and in the Lord's Supper!

I think of a time there was a two-year-old boy about to go into surgery. As the nurses took him from his parents he began to cry. At that moment I spoke the blessing of the Lord: **"The Lord bless you and keep you..."** (and so on). And at the Word of God the child had heard so often in worship he stopped crying and calmed down.

When the Lord doesn't calm the storm... He calms us through His Word. So **Do not be afraid**, but hear and believe that the God who saved you eternally is with you right now as well!

But why does the Lord bring us into such storms? There can be many reasons, above all teaching us to stop trusting in ourselves, our money and stuff, and to rely on Him. But the Lord has never promised to tell us exactly what He is doing and we don't need to torture ourselves trying to figure out His purpose.

It is enough to listen to the promise the Holy Spirit had Paul write down for us a couple years before the storm in our lesson. What we hear in Romans 8: **We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose (28).**

But why will God do all these good things for us? Not because we deserve it! Not when we know all too well how easily we can give way to fear, panic, doubt and worry and even accusing God of wrong when troubles seem overwhelming. No all we deserve from God is death and the endless death of hell.

So, God does all this good for us only because of His grace, His undeserved mercy that Paul summed up with this phrase: **the God to whom I belong.**

We belong to God, not because we chose Him, but He chose us and paid the price to set us free from sin and death.

Indeed, there is no greater proof for you that God loves you, saves you, and will work eternal good out of even the worst storms of life, than that the Son of God Himself, Jesus Christ came into this world and put Himself in the “boat with us.”

Jesus was in a storm on the Sea of Galilee too, but He trusted God’s promises so perfectly that He could sleep peacefully on a boat starting to sink! That’s the perfection Christ places over us to cover our often-shaky faith.

And then on the cross Jesus stepped into the full storm of God’s righteous anger against all our sins of fear and worry, our guilt and all the rest and He stilled that storm with His Words: **It is Finished** and with His innocent death. And by His rising from the dead to scatter the gloomy clouds of death, Jesus gives us peace with God now and forever!

Therefore, even **When the Lord doesn’t calm the storms...** in this brief life, **He will carry us** through the storms, even the storm of death itself and bring us to that perfect life to come

That’s why years after our lesson, as Paul sat in a cold dungeon in Rome, waiting the executioner to come and put him to death, He wrote this in 2 Timothy: **The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.**

When the Lord doesn’t calm the storms... He will calm us and carry us until He brings us to that golden shore where there are **storms no more**. Amen.

So keep up your courage, because I believe God that it will be exactly the way I have been told. Amen.