



ZLC TEXT MESSAGE

Exploring the Bible One Text at a Time

The Mighty Acts of God: Facing Stormy Seas

Note: If you would enjoy an overview of the Book of Acts, and to have the stage set for what has happened in the book prior to this week's reading, extra copies are available near the sermon copies in the narthex.

Acts 27:1, 13-36

27¹ 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.

¹³ When 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.

Scripture

Reflections

A part of the ELW Service of Evening Prayer begins, “Lord, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown...”

Paul’s journey is nearing an end. He has traveled for about 15 years. He’s gone thousands of miles, planted numerous churches, brought countless converts into the fold, and completely changed the landscape of who’s in and who’s out of the family. He’s been arrested, beaten, ridiculed, and threatened. Through it all he has followed God’s call to tell the world about Jesus. And now, after another long imprisonment, Paul has appealed his case to the Roman emperor. So for the last time he is put on a ship to head east.

The going won’t be easy. Paul has to endure more trauma: months of sailing, a fierce storm, shipwreck, a poisonous snake bite before he reaches Rome. Even once he arrives he doesn’t know what lies ahead. But isn’t that the way life goes? Days can bring unexpected challenges or surprising joys. Will we sink? Will we swim? And most importantly, will we continue to place our trust in God regardless of what we encounter along the way?

Ultimately, what we can learn from Paul is how the ELW prayer concludes: “Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us. Amen.”

Food for Thought

1. Have you ever set out for a journey “of which you could not see the ending?” What was that like?

2. How have you felt God was watching over you?

Additional Reading

Chapter 28: Paul finally arrives at Rome, where he is welcomed by a group of believers. Though he is under house arrest, Paul is able to receive visitors and continues to preach Christ’s resurrection to all who will listen. The book of Acts ends leaving Paul’s fate unnamed; perhaps this is Luke’s way of emphasizing that the story goes on. What the Holy Spirit has set in motion through Paul – the inclusion of the Gentiles and the spread of the gospel around the world – continues as long as there are ears to hear and stories to share.