

### **ACTS 27:1-26 (Amended)**

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...The next day we put in at Sidon and Julius treated Paul kindly and allowed him to go to his friends to be cared for. Putting out to sea from there...the centurion found an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty as the wind was against us... Since much time has been lost and sailing was now dangerous, Paul advised them saying, "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." But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. Since the harbor was not suitable for spending the winter, the majority was in favor of putting to sea from there on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix where they could spend the winter.

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. But soon a violent northeaster rushed down from Crete. Since the ship was caught and could not be turned head-on into the wind, we gave way to it and were driven. But running under the lee of a small island, we were scarcely able to get the ship under control... We were being pounded by the storm so violently that on the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard and on the third day with their own hands, they threw the ship's tackle

overboard. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and no small tempest raged, all hope of our being saved was abandoned.

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. I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For last night there stood by me an angel of God to whom I belong and whom I worship. And 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.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have told. But we have to run aground on some island."

## THE VOYAGE

### Acts 27:1-26 (Amended)

The story told in this moving scripture should be one of great interest to this congregation which is on the cusp of dramatic change. Paul was on a Voyage that held both peril and promise. And it is not unlike what Trinity Presbyterian is presently to embark upon. To gain a perspective for what the future may hold, let us first look back in history to the Voyage that Paul took. There are some interesting parallels.

By this time in his ministry, Paul had become the principle evangelist for what was known as the Way; that is, the first Christian worshipping communities. But while these fledgling churches were gaining traction in Greece and Italy, they had run into headwinds in Jerusalem and were bitterly opposed by the Jewish autocracy. And let us remember that it was Jesus' conflict with establishment Jews that led to his crucifixion. And let us also recall that Israel was a part of the Roman empire. This meant Paul's evangelical success had become a thorn in their side. So the Elders filed a grievance about him to the Emperor who subsequently ordered Paul to be arrested and to appear before him for an investigation.

This, then, sets in motion Paul's Voyage from Palestine to Rome to be interrogated by the Emperor himself. It was a sailing trip fraught with dangers and near calamities. And let me remind you that these same seas have in modern times claimed the lives of thousands of immigrants seeking to flee from

their home countries for a better life.

Paul and several other prisoners were accompanied on the trip by a few of his supporters, but they were merely passengers who were hitchhiking, if you will, upon a grain ship bound for Italy. During passage Paul was both liked and respected by his Roman centurion escort who was to deliver him to the emperor. Even though he was a prisoner, he was well treated and his opinion was respected. Nevertheless, the ship's pilot chose not to take his advice to pull ashore for the winter when the winds would turn dangerously against them. Instead, the captain took a chance on the weather, but his decision backfired when they soon ran into life threatening conditions forcing him to order extreme measures by lightening the load to save both their lives and the ship by dumping the grain and throwing shipping tackle overboard to avoid sinking. They ended up grounding the ship in the sand off a small island.

So here is Trinity grounded on its own Voyage into the future. There have been many passengers aboard since it set sail nearly 30 years ago who for various reasons have departed at different ports of call during the journey. Dozens got off the ship because of conflicts with a pastor; many died along the way; and some disembarked for theological or political reasons. (No one, it must be noted, ever walked the plank.) In the meantime, while many others came aboard, the number of passengers continued to decline.

Nevertheless, Trinity's Voyage is not finished. So let us return to Acts and see what happens following the grounding of the vessel. In the spring, they set

sail on another ship and eventually made it to Italy. Paul was allowed to visit the Roman Church which was growing among the Gentile population—the same church to which wrote from prison his lengthy letter considered to be one of the greatest theological treatises in history and unparalleled in Christian literature.

That was the plus side of his journey's conclusion. Do not forget, however, that he was a prisoner being extradited for violations of Jewish law making him a risk to foment a revolution. The emperor agreed he was dangerous and sentenced him to death.

So, let's circle back to Trinity's Voyage. Currently she is badly listing cast about by the high seas of increasing expenses, decreasing revenues and overworked leadership which are forcing a reckoning. We are not alone. This is sadly the state of many small Presbyterian churches who are madly baling to stay afloat. Lots of our problems could be solved by merging together and the momentum to do so seems to be building.

If, however, a merger does not materialize, then the building must be sold, period. Who buys it will go a long way to determine your destination. So many decisions must be made in the near future which will impact you significantly. Some of you will likely decide to get off at the next port. Others of you will wait and see how it all plays out over the months and even years ahead.

And I want to be candid with you about my role this process—it is zero. I have appropriately recused myself from these negotiations because there will clearly become a point when I will need to step aside to let others pilot the ship.

What is not clear is when that will be. However, I am committed to staying on board as long as I can make a positive contribution to your future together.

Using Paul as our role model, Luke makes abundantly clear that he had faith that God would see them through the remainder of their Voyage and that they would land safely in Italy. No matter how this turns out, remember Paul's assurance to his shipmates: *I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.* Other ships will sail. Be open to God's Spirit and watch for sails to unfurl.

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