

**ALL SAINTS WESTON**

**SUNDAY 15 DECEMBER 2024**

**ALL THROUGH THE STORM**

**LUKE 27: 27 – 44**

**TITLE SLIDE**

Well - what a wonderful, first-hand, eyewitness account of this storm and shipwreck Luke has given us. Last week Andrew gave us The Storm Part 1 and today I get to tell Part 2. Luke in his skilled writing almost book-ends powerful winds. First the mighty rushing wind of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and at the end another mighty rushing wind, the north eastern that blew down on this large cargo ship with 276 people on board. I don't know that there is anything else like it in ancient history writing.

By the way did you know that Paul had been shipwrecked 3 times before this one in Luke. He tells us that in his second letter to the Corinthians, a letter written while he was staying in Ephesus before this incident in Acts. Paul could write the idiot's guide to being shipwrecked and how to survive it.

You'll be devastated to know that I am not going to have time to talk about what happened on the island of Malta in chapter 28 after they were shipwrecked. So you won't be able to learn about the weird Pentecostal churches in America that practise snake-handling as a Biblical thing to do. But I do have time to tell you about a very fundamentalist Christian a long time ago

who was, like Paul shipwrecked but unlike Paul, he was shipwrecked on a desert island. And what's more he was the only survivor from the ship. He is stranded there for a few years until a rescue boat finds him. When the rescuers get onto the island, they are amazed to see what the man has built to survive.

**DESERT ISLAND SLIDE**

The man had built three different structures out of bamboo and leaves. They asked the man what the first structure was. The man said, "*That's my house.*" They then asked about the second structure. "*That's where I go to Church.*" The man replied. Then they asked about the third structure. A frown came over the man's face as he told the rescuers, "*That's where I used to go to Church but I disagreed with their teaching and choice of music so I left.*"

Ah well you will be pleased to hear there are no more like that!

Now back to our passage. Today in my talk there are no classic three or four points. Instead I'm going to work my way through the passage line by line and verse by verse, rather like a Bible Commentary. So here goes. We pick up where we left off last week. Paul and the rest of the people on board are still in the middle of the storm and Paul has told everyone on board that they will be saved but that they will have to run aground on some island. Verse 27

**SLIDE V. 27A:** *When the fourteenth night had come we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea'*

The storm has been raging for two weeks and unable to steer the ship they are being 'driven' by the winds. Three times in this account Luke uses the phrase 'driven along'. Their rudimentary steering paddles are useless. They are rudderless. Many people are like that ship - rudderless and driven by the winds. Many countries seem rudderless and driven by the winds of war, of people competing for power, at the mercy of climate change. Many people, some of whom we know, are driven by their addictions or by their weaknesses or by circumstances over which they seem to have no control. The Anglican Church national speaking feels a bit like it is being driven by the winds at the moment. I hope no one here feels driven by the winds today. If there is, at the very least ask someone to come and pray with and for you.

**SLIDE V.27B:** *When about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land.*

But, things are about to turn. Somehow the sailors sense there is land. How did they do that? It is still dark. Did they smell land or could they hear the sound of waves crashing on rocks. Thankfully every storm ends in sooner or later. Midnight may come but midnight always goes. The sun does rise every morning. The seas are not endless. Sooner or later any ship will arrive at or hit land. Sooner or later this or that trial will come to an end. A dictator will fall. An illness will end. A crisis will resolve itself. There is always hope – especially when Christ is in the ship with you.

**SLIDE V.28:** *They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep.*

Notice yet another mark of Luke's precision. It almost seems like he wrote the account whilst they were recovering on the island of Malta, while all the details are fresh in his mind. 120 feet deep, 90 feet deep. This act of dropping a knotted rope with a lead weight at the end of it is where we get our expression to 'take soundings' meaning to get the advice and opinions of others. In any crisis or before any major decision, it is always good to take soundings from people you know and trust and respect. Whether that be in our private lives and decision making or as a church. For example it is a right and proper thing for the church council and church leaders to take soundings when the need arises, especially over key matters.

**SLIDE V.29** *Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.*

Notice that the sailors did two things in this new situation of danger They did something about the things they could control and they did something about the things they could not control. They acted practically and spiritually. They dropped four anchors from the rear of the boat to slow it down and they also prayed for daylight. Of course there was no need to pray for morning to come. It will come without prayers as we noted above. But daylight is another matter. Remember they have not been able to see where they are for 14 days. If they are to have any chance of not being dashed on rocks they have to be able to see.

Practical action for the things you can do and prayer for the things outside of your control. That is always a good combination. You will doubtless have heard that old saying

that we should pray as if everything depended on God and work as if everything depended on us. There is much if not total truth in that saying.

In one of his sermon notes on this passage John Wesley said

#### **SLIDE: WESLEY QUOTE**

*God never designed that any promise of His should people to remain inactive, when he has given them natural capacities of doing something, at least, for their own benefit. To expect the accomplishment of any promise of God, without exerting our natural capacities is a vain and dangerous presumption.*

Wesley emphasises man's part in a crisis but another commentator on this passage uses these four anchors as a metaphor for God's action. So he talks about:

#### **SLIDE: FOUR ANCHORS**

- The anchor of God's presence
- The anchor of God's plan
- The anchor of God's protection
- The anchor of God's peace

Thankfully, all these anchors are available to us and the book of Hebrews give us another anchor **SLIDE: ANCHOR HOPE:** The anchor of our hope in Christ and all God's promises – it is an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

What was not firm and secure was the crew of the ship. Unlike God or his servant Paul, they could not be relied on do the right thing.

**SLIDE V.30** *In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow.*

Crises and danger bring out both the best and the worst in humankind. In every disaster be it man-made like war or a natural disaster, both sides of humanity will be seen. There will be those who will try to help or rescue others and those who will loot and steal. There will be those who act bravely in the interests of others, often putting their own lives at risk and those who will wantonly and cruelly destroy lives. We are seeing some of the worst horrors that humankind is capable of inflicting on others right now as stories emerge from Syria. But we will also hear stories of courage and solidarity.

For the crew on Paul's ship it was all a question of saving their own lives and everyone else can fend for themselves. And what's more they went about it deceitfully. But fortunately, Paul, who had in effect had taken over the leadership from the centurion, the captain and the owners of the grain stepped in

**SLIDE: V. 31-32** *Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.*

Had those sailors been allowed to slip away like that, the ship would have been entirely at the mercy of the waves, winds

and rocks that awaited them. Paul's quick-thinking judgment must have realised that these untrustworthy men were needed and in the providence of God, they had a part to play. Those sailors must have had -pardon the pun – a truly sinking feeling when they saw the lifeboat drifting away. How they must have cursed Paul – but probably cursed him with mutterings under their breaths. But it is of course entirely possible that Paul's action saved their lives.

It was still dark when they were about to get into the lifeboat and so they may have found themselves being dashed against the rocks. As it was, in the end all they had to do was float or swim to shore. Having stopped the crew abandoning ship, Paul now turns his attention to the needs of everyone on board who are exhausted, terrified, scared of death by drowning and as we heard last week had given up all hope of being saved. Paul now comes in with some very basic and practical advice. You need to eat something.

**SLIDE: V 33-37A** *Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.*

So here they are, in the dark, wet through and cold and Paul is holding what looks very much like a service of Holy Communion. *'he took some bread, gave thanks and broke it and began to eat'*. I bet he managed to get in a few words

about the Last Supper. Paul never wasted an opportunity to preach the gospel -in season and out of season – at appropriate times and inappropriate times. That was Paul. But he also gave them a pep talk. He told them it was going to be alright. *'For the last fourteen days, you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head will be lost'*. Now where have we heard that phrase before? Well actually we heard it in Luke's first book called the gospel of Luke, the story of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. In Luke 21 Jesus is speaking to his disciples and is warning them about some of the troubles and persecution that will come to them as disciples and he then says this: *'You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.'* Maybe those words of Jesus were familiar to Paul and at this moment of great danger when people had given up all hope, Paul prompted by the Spirit, dug out from his memory bank these words of Jesus. It's good to have the words of scripture deeply embedded in your memory and you can only do that through reading and re-reading and hearing scripture expounded. And of course preachers should quote a lot of scripture too in their preaching.

And the result of having some food in their bellies, and hearing these upbeat words of Paul and seeing his confidence, Luke says *'they were all encouraged'*. When you're down and out, you need someone to make you eat and someone to cheer you up. Maybe that's what the Monday Food Club and Lunch is all about. Notice again the authenticity of this account when Luke gives the precise number of people on board.

**SLIDE: V.37B** *When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.*

Interestingly earlier in the chapter Luke says they began to throw overboard the cargo and the ship's tackle. Evidently they had not jettisoned all the valuable cargo. Now it seems they were throwing it all into the sea – this grain which is being exported from the grain basket of Egypt to the bustling city of Rome. Life is more important than material possessions but it takes a crisis to realise that. And also we see that very often it is the case that people have to get rid of everything or be stripped of everything before they can save their life spiritually, before they can receive eternal life. The prodigal son had to be brought to his lowest point before he could come to his spiritual senses and return home. Here the lifeboat and the cargo and the tackle all had to go.

**SLIDE: HEBREWS** The writer to the Hebrews, says *'let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us'*. Over the next few weeks it will be so, so easy to add to what we already have by way of material valuables, to spend our time feasting and then sleeping it off. And in so doing we miss re-seeing and re-encountering the truly wonderful Christ who is at the centre of it all.

Now having had their pep talk and eaten something and done something practical to make the ship as light as possible, at last the morning light comes and there before them is the land.

*When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf. The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping.*

The danger is not over yet. They have cut loose the anchors so that the ship has a free run to the shore, they have untied the awkward steering paddles that are to the port and starboard of the ship and which can be used to try and steer the ship. They have put the sail back up again in the hope that the wind will blow them onto the beach. They have done all they can but even so it is not a smooth run. They hit a hidden sandbank. Even when we have done all we can, sometimes there are hidden dangers, pitfalls and obstacles. And now the soldiers see another danger. What if all the prisoners run off, when they do get to land? And although Paul has become the de facto leader, he is still a prisoner, so Paul's life is still in danger. It seems that it was the practice of the Roman authorities that if a soldier or a guard was so careless as to allow someone to escape from their custody, then they would be punished, including losing their own lives. Luke says exactly that happened when Peter escaped from prison led by the angel, back in Acts 12. Luke says *'And after Herod searched for Peter and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death.'*

*But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship.*

Fortunately the centurion who has not been much in show so far but who evidently respected Paul stops his men from carrying out their plan and now he the centurion gives an order. If you can swim get into the sea and if you can't find a good piece of wood and surf or paddleboard your way to land. And so that is what they all did. The chapter but not the story concludes with:

**V.43** *In this way everyone reached land safely.*

We are not told what Paul and Luke and Aristarchus did. But given what Paul has done, we wouldn't be surprised, would we, if he had walked his way over the waves? So if there had been a film crew there in what is now known as St Paul's Bay we would have seen 276 bedraggled figures sitting shell-shocked and exhausted on the beach and then smiles or tears of relief spreading across their faces. There would be hugging and shaking of hands and back-slapping. And then local inhabitants coming to meet them. They must have spotted the ship lying off the shore. And immediately they get a fire going to warm the shipwrecked party. And Luke, admirer of Paul that he was, writes down that Paul was gathering sticks for the fire. Still busy, still doing what he could by way of practical action.

And there we must leave Paul, Luke, Aristarchus, the cowardly sailors, the centurion, the platoon of soldiers, the owner of the ship, the merchants and all the other passengers. I wonder

how many of them embraced Paul's teaching and began to follow Christ as a result of this experience. I wonder how many shrugged it off as a lucky escape. We will never know – well at least not on this earth.

What a rollicking story – literally rollicking. What an example of godly leadership. What an example of how to be when you are in the eye of the storm and when death is knocking on your door. **SLIDE** What an example of how to encourage others in their time of trial. What a picture of God's promise, his plan, his presence, his protection and his peace.

Let's pray.

There's only one song we could sing now. That old hymn "will your anchor hold in the storms of life"