

Read Psalm 116:1-14 and Acts 27-28:16. Storytellers Jim and Janet Stahl and George and Mary Huttar told the story this morning.

Wonderful story – and quite a dangerous adventure. Did you catch the account?

- A ship, put out to sea, against the wind; sailed slowly; arrived with difficulty; much time had been lost; sailing now dangerous; with danger and heavy loss; violent wind; all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned

Sounds like Pirates of the Caribbean. Captain Jack Sparrow, Will Turner were on a quest to save beautiful Elizabeth, the governor's daughter, and recapture the Black Pearl; the first of many adventures (and many sequels!). Exciting stuff. Dangerous.

Paul too was on a quest, a God-given journey. On the outside folks would define him as an ordinary prisoner. But on the inside God's adventure of a lifetime was happening as Paul journeyed to Rome to witness to the Emperor; which would eventually turn the entire Roman Empire to Christ. That vision drove Paul's life.

I don't know why things weren't easier or more mundane. But by this time, Paul must have been used to it. Here's what he said:

“Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm” (2 Cor. 11:25-27).

Exciting stuff. Sort of.

So I don't imagine Paul was really surprised. He tried to prevent it – *hey guys, you are a little late, sailing season is over . . . let's wait.*

You see, according to experts, Paul probably had an estimated 3,500 miles at sea, with eleven voyages on the Mediterranean; probably more experience than any of those on the ship.

But they embarked; one lonely Christian among some 300 pagan sailors, soldiers, and prisoners into a dangerous sea, past the season of reasonable nautical travel. Paul's level headed advice went ignored.

How do you make decisions? Do you take reality into consideration? Or, do you ignore reality and expect God to “work it all out according to your plans?” Paul used common sense. God works in the normal course of life and nature. Paul understood that. So he prayed and then went

only where he sensed the Holy Spirit leading him. This time the odds said, “Wait.” That is Holy Spirit wisdom.

But, the men in charge said, “We’re going.” Not long afterward they hit violent winds. The word in Greek means “typhoon.” And it went downhill from there.

Now regardless of how you got into trouble, once you get into trouble, what do you do?

When I was in college (C. W. Post) I lived on the north shore of Long Island, New York. Boating was big. One afternoon I went out with a young man in his small fishing boat into Oyster Bay. But after a couple of hours dark clouds began to roll in and the wind picked up. For those of you who know me, I do not do water well – I get seasick on a Texas pond. So it seemed good to me to head for shore. I had no problem sharing that. But the young man had his own ideas. So he pulled out a long flashlight and attached it to the boat so we could see in the dark.

Like that would make me feel better.

What we saw was a wall of rain swiftly moving across the water until it engulfed us. Well, my friend finally thought perhaps we should head back and so he turned the boat around. But after a few minutes the motor made a noise and the boat suddenly quit moving. He pulled the motor up, fiddled with it, and then announced he had sheared some sort of pin which controlled the propeller.

Things were not going well for him and me at that point.

Should Paul have blamed those unthinking navigators? He was a better person than I.

Now, in this story we get a glimpse of Paul’s character. You see, all those things that happened to him which I read earlier – the challenges, threats of danger; the long journeys which required great persistence; the conflicts with people who pretend to be faithful and are not – all these things made him a great man.

So, in times of distress he did not act like a victim, nor deny his faith, or abandon ship. He was prepared to endure whatever came his way. That’s why he was able to tell his churches “do those things you have learned and received and seen and heard in me, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:9).

That may seem like bragging to us, but for him, he gave his all. So it is actually a statement of how Jesus Christ had shaped him and how wonderful that was. It’s valuable to be able to say about your life, “I’m a disciple. I strive to please God; to press on, learning to love Jesus. I strive to make Him first. That’s how Paul lived.

How’s your stick-to-itiveness? When times are hard, whether here in church ministry, or in school, or on the job, do you give up? Or, are you resolute? God just might be training you for something very significant.

Let me rephrase that. God, if He is not already, WILL train you in this way. Why? Because God wants you to be strong; he is making you into a person of character. God desires you to be like Paul, who was like Jesus.

So when all hope of survival was abandoned Paul did not give up. No, Paul spoke up.

He encouraged them with words straight from God.

“I urge you now to keep up your courage, for none of you will lose your lives.” (27:22) How many times must Jesus have said these encouraging words for Paul when his hope was lost? Paul was able to be encouraging because the Lord brought him through time and time again.

He said it like this, “The God to whom I belong and whom I worship stood by me.”

Do you trust that God will stand with you? Trust it.

Paul writes: (Ro 8:35, 37)

“Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? . . . No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.”

And so he passed that good news along to those pagans, saying, “I worship this God.” “I have faith in this God that things will go exactly as the angel told me.”

Then he urged them, “You must exhibit faith by staying with me and the ship.” Paul then picked up a loaf of bread, gave thanks, and calmly gave them dinner.

That's security. That's peace in the midst of the storm.

He modeled discipleship. He knew God wanted to save these people's lives, even though they used poor judgment; even though they had messed up. God wanted to rescue them.

Do you realize God wants to save people in Duncanville?

Hard things happen because God is doing something beautiful. If these troubles had not come about, none of them would have had the need to listen to Paul.

Again, as they landed on the island of Malta, things are no less “adventurous” when a viper attaches itself to Paul's hand. Once again, God worked these crazy circumstances so that people listened to Paul. When it was time to go the people were so grateful they supplied all their needs.

God is good – all the time. God always knows what He is doing.

I imagine as they pulled away and Paul reflected on this trip he might have been thinking something like this:

Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of
Arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body,
But rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up,
totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming,
WOW !!!! What a ride!

That poem is anonymous. Would you like to call it for your own? You can if you offer your life to purposefully live for something really important. Then you too can boast *I gave my life to Jesus Christ, sliding in broadside proclaiming, Wow! What a ride!*

AMEN