

8-8-2021

“Do Not Give Up”

(Acts 27:13-26)

The last time that I was on a ship was when I went to Mackinac Island with my family for summer vacation a few years ago. After staying in beautiful Traverse City, we headed up north. Our ride on a ferry to the island from Mackinac city was comparably short. But it was refreshing enough to cool off my body and mind on a steaming July day. Except for the strong scent of horse droppings everywhere, I enjoyed the island a lot, especially the crystal clear pure Michigan Lake. I miss those playful moments when we soaked our feet in the water and rode bicycles together as a family.

I have not gone on one yet, but I believe many of you have gone on a cruise before, right? One of my former church friends, Diane and Laura, were huge fans of this particular type of trip. They were very close as sisters; they lived in the same town and played the bell choir together at the church. And their annual vacation was always a cruise. I remember them saying, “You should try it, Mi-Sook. You don’t need to do anything but just relax, eat, and play on the big boat. It is heaven!”

Unlike our leisurely travel on the ship, back in Jesus’ time in the biblical narratives, the ship was a means of living for the fishermen. And it was also a means of transportation. In our scripture passage following the VBS lesson, we meet the apostle Paul on a ship on his way to Rome.

He was neither going fishing nor going on a business trip to sell the tents he made, and he was definitely not enjoying a vacation. Paul was in fact on a Roman ship that carried cargo, travelers, and also prisoners.

Since Paul met the Risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, his life was completely reversed. Once a proud Roman citizen who chased after the Christians, now became an evangelist and missionary to preach the gospel - the crucified and risen Christ. And because of his witness about Jesus and worshiping God instead of the emperor, he was accused of treason and causing public riots against Caesar, the king of Rome. He was beaten, stoned, and thrown into prison.

The background of today's story is when Paul was being transferred from Caesarea to Rome after he spent two years in imprisonment. Paul did not stop his self-defense in front of the governors of Judea like Felix and Festus. He even made his appeal to Caesar. That is why he was sent to Rome.

Here's the roadmap for his journey toward Rome. William, could you show us the next slide? Leaving Caesarea, the ship sailed to Sidon and other port cities following the coastline. Sailing through the winter season was dangerous and challenging in the Mediterranean Sea. Paul warned about the storm, and the majority in the ship agreed to stay on the land. But the centurion did not listen to them.

The ship continued to sail in the tricky sea. When they passed the largest Greek Island Crete, the weather got treacherous. Being pounded by violent wind and storm, the ship lost control and got damaged. People in the ship began to dump things up in the sea - first cargo overboard, and then tackle, and provisions. Many days without sun and moon passed. They were hopeless.

In this grim situation of despair, Paul spoke up as he has done so many times preaching in front of crowds. He told the terrified people on the ship how an angel showed up to him the previous night saying, "Do not be afraid." Paul confidently said that their lives will be sustained although the ship will be lost. He urged them to keep up their courage.

"Do not be afraid!"

We hear these words when the angels, messengers of God, appear to the people of God with a special calling in the biblical stories.

This Paul, a Jesus freak, was most likely considered a threat to the Roman power as Jesus was - as if he was a modern day's anarchist movement leader assumably. But did he do any harm to anyone because of his faith? He healed the sick and urged the divided Christian communities to accept each other in grace. Although he helped many, because of his passion for the gospel, his love for Jesus, Paul was imprisoned three times and escaped from the throes of death countless times.

However, he did not give up his faith in God and kept proclaiming the good news of hope and new life in Christ.

Are you in the eyes of the storm right now?

Do you feel hopeless and want to give up?

Bad things can happen to good people.

Sometimes we want to ask God what we have done so wrong that we have to suffer all these problems. Even when we try to live a godly life following Jesus and do good, we meet the hazardous winds and storms on our journey. We feel like we will be shipwrecked and forsaken. We cannot see that a new morning is coming - the breaking of a new day in the dark.

In those moments of doubt and despair, I hope you remember the voice of God whispering through the angels: "Do not be afraid!" God who showed up to Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Mary, Joseph, and Paul, is right beside you, suffering with you and working for you. Your life will be sustained by the power of love, by the hands of a merciful Creator, who makes all things new, all things well. That is the promise that we need to hold on to.

So my friends, whatever dire circumstances you are in now, whatever battle you're fighting now, do not give up. God is for you. Wherever you go on your next journey ahead, do not fear. God is with you. God is with us here and now, now and forever. Amen.