

## God's Saving Plan©

Isaiah 43:1-7; Acts 27:39-44

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### Introduction from Acts 27:1-38:

Paul is still a prisoner, being taken to Rome (at his request) by the Roman centurion, Julias, a member of the elite guard who Julias treats Paul decently. By the way the narrative reads, Luke is with them on this trip. They sail north, along the northeast shore of Cyprus, being protected from the winds out of the west. They sail along the coast westward to the port of Myra. At that point they are transferred to another ship from Egypt that is heading to Italy. They ran into very rough weather and made to the southern coast of the island Crete. Luke says they docked at Good Harbor, which was an appropriate name at that time!

Paul warns them that it is very dangerous to sail, now, because of the time of year ... winter coming on, but they don't listen to him and off they go. Of course, they do get into very troubled waters with a northeasterner ... storms and rough seas. For days they don't eat and finally they lost all hope of being rescued.

But at that point, Paul spoke to them all, telling them he had a dream from an angel of God assuring him that they would all be safe ... yes, they would lose ship and cargo but their lives would be spared. He encouraged them to all eat and the words Luke uses for the blessing and passing of the bread reminds us of the Lord's Supper ... food for assurance and encouragement ... for strength in the midst of the storm.

**Read verse 39 through 44 ....**

### Sermon

My only real experience with being in the rough waters of the sea was when we lived right on the beach at Carolina Beach, North Carolina. First of all, there were 3 hurricanes in 2 months (September and October) so we knew what was like to be watching those waves and the clouds and winds.

My dad, who loved to fish, wanted me to go out deep sea fishing with him. So, I got on the boat with him and my stepmom (Fred had the good sense not to go). While I get motion sickness quite easily, I didn't take anything like Dramamine because I wanted to be awake. I did try some natural supplements, which did not work.

By the time we were almost to our first spot to put out our lines, I was feeling terrible! I did catch a Red Snapper my very first try! It was THIS big! But that was the only fish I even tried to catch the rest of the day because each time we moved, my head was hanging over the railing. Someone put a stack of saltine crackers in my hand, which I

held onto all day – even when I laid down on the bunk. That was the roughest 8 hours of my life. And my only real experience of what it's like to be in a boat on rough seas with clouds and rain and cold winds and high waves. It was not fun. Not fun at all! And I know that was nothing compared to Paul and Luke's experience.

It is not unusual to read about storms and rough journeys on the sea from Scripture. We think of another prophet ... Jonah, in the Old Testament ... a messenger of God but not one who is very obedient, like Paul. Jonah ran away from God and what God wanted him to do, and ended up in the belly of the fish.

We think of the disciples and the time they were in the boat with Jesus, who was sleeping and a sudden storm came up. They were terrified, but Jesus stood up and calmed the wind and the waves.

And here is Paul, the messenger of God, the missionary to the Gentiles, a prisoner, on his way to Rome for a hearing. He has believed that God's plan was for him to go to Rome and preach and whatever way God makes that come about is fine with Paul.

Paul trusts God's provision and protection. He convinces Julius, his guard, that they were all going to live – and a word about Julius – he likes Paul and thus will not allow the sailors to throw over the prisoners. God's protective umbrella covers not only Paul, his obedient servant, but also extends out to all the others as well.

The storms of the sea and the rough turmoil of the waves is a good symbol for us, even today. I've come to know you ... something about most all of you ... and I know that there is not a person in this room who has not either experienced a storm in your life in the near past, or you are going through it right now.

But I believe that God has plans for us and is leading and watching over us all. As God speaks through Isaiah so beautifully, saying "Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you. I've called your name. You're mine. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end --- Because I am God, your personal God, your Savior, I paid a huge price for you. That's how much you mean to me!" God is present and watching over us.

Paul and Luke and the others on that ship that plowed through stormy waters and ended up shipwrecked – they had protection from God who was watching over them, who had a destination for them. And they had each other. Paul made sure even those who kept him a prisoner, who would have thrown him and the other prisoners overboard to die, were taken care of, fed, assured and encouraged.

We too, have the same God who is constantly watching over us ... present with us, who has a destination ... a plan for us. It is the same God from Isaiah who loves us so much that He paid a huge price ... his own Son, Jesus, so that we would be saved from the

storms and rough seas of our sinful lives; saved from the death that we will all face someday.

This is God who not only is with us and guarding us and guiding us through the rough seas in our lives (and we all will have them, even may experience shipwreck) but He gives us each other as well.

It's why I believe the Church is such a precious gift to us ... we have one another to help us and hold us up during the storms ... besides knowing all the fun and laughter of a family that is close.

It's why I believe and encourage you ... on this big Rally Day ... to find a class or a group within the church that will not only help you to learn and grow but will be that special support, that place where you can bond and find help and comfort and joy even in the rough seas of life. It's also the place where you can be all that to those around you.

Paul told his shipmates ... "Don't give up ... take heart." (Verses 24-25). Peterson writes in his commentary of this passage in the Message: "God would strip them of what had obscured their awareness of him – the ship, the job, the mad rush to Rome. But their lives would be preserved.

God also is out to get us," Peterson says, "you and me. Everything we consider a loss can be a chance to discover God at the center, to realize the preciousness of life itself, of love unencumbered by lust and pride and greed. The Voice keeps arriving in the midst of terror and disaster and hopelessness: "Don't give up ... take heart."

The Voice is the Holy Spirit that speaks to us and through us to one another.

We will all have our storms – individually we suffer storms in relationships, in our physical bodies, in our finances, in our hearts.

And as a community – the Church – the Body of Christ, it is the same way. We go through difficult times together. But we also go through joyful times, right in the middle of the storm. God is here. We are here together. We will make it through any storm ... together.

With the power of the Holy Spirit with us and in us ... trust me ... I believe ... I know it is true ... with the Holy Spirit, anything can happen ... it already has, and I know that it will again!