

## ***Acts 27:27-44: To Rome VI: Shipwrecked!***

### ***Introduction:***

People of God!

In terms of our gathering for worship it's actually an exciting Sunday. We're moving from here into Advent, and from today's passage into the last chapter of Acts, and Paul's arrival to Rome by way of Malta and a miracle. Today's a transitional moment for us just like it's a transitional moment for Paul all all those aboard this ship they've been trapped on for so long now.

Today we're on theme. It's Thanksgiving this coming week and I want to talk about thankfulness this morning. Today's passage launches us right into it, so that's a gift of coincidence.

Let's pray, and move forward:

### ***Prayer:***

### ***Fourteen Days & Getting Worse:***

Two weeks now, they've been pushed by the wind. We read:

**27 On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic[c] Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. 28 They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet[d] deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet[e] deep. 29 Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. 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. 31 Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.” 32 So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.**

### **Getting Worse: Saved Together**

Here’s what we should notice here. We should notice that just as this ship was wrong together--wrong to not listen to Paul when he first said “Let’s not sail to Phoenix. Let’s stay in Fair Havens” --just as they were wrong together in ignoring him, they need saved together by listening to him.

We don't know the mechanics of this, we don't know why Paul knows everyone needs to stay together if salvation is going to come to any one of them. But it's all or nothing in their rescue, their salvation, just as it was all or nothing in their choice to sail on.

Fast-arriving, ever-shallower soundings mean they are coming up on something fast, something they can't stop themselves from being slammed against. And some sailors decide to try to save themselves. They have some skill, they have a boat; to them, it's certain death ahead, and just probable death if they jump ship. It's a reasonable calculation--good math--to bail. It's totally self-interested, but it's not bad math. Some is better than none, and if the some is us, then, well, aren't we lucky. We probably deserve it! Our reward for our risk!

But what Paul knows is that more than math is at play. If they leave, everyone dies, including them. (At least, everyone but Paul; he's going to Rome, God's promised that.)

The people on this ship, who made a wrong choice together, will only survive if they now make the right

choice together.

If we were considering how to apply this, we could consider issues of complicity, and what it means to be complicit--responsible for--both the errors and restoration of those groups we align with. We could talk about dependency, and the way in which our safety and healing and rescue might be dependent upon the choices the group we're a part of makes. All this should make us think about the groups we're a part of, the ones in which we have a voice, and how we use that voice and when. We could consider if a "house divided" can stand.

### ***Getting Worse: Other Things:***

But other things happen, here, too: Julian trusts Paul. The soldiers under Julian's charge listen to him. These are the ones Paul interacts with, the ones who act to keep the crew and passengers together.

It's a typical display of power, this moment: to refuse these soldiers is to be beaten, their influence is based on the fear of their violence, the punishment the sailors will feel if they don't obey them. While it's typical, though, it's...unsettling, for me. To go too far with this is to say God wants those of us who listen to

God to make use of those with power to get our way. Leverage military and the threat of punishment to get what we know God wants. It's a small leap to say violence is justifiable, and if people are a threat to us, then we end the threat.

Whatever we make of this interesting moment, though, I think what Luke really wants us to see is that Paul is a good Roman Citizen who has the trust of these Roman soldiers. We should notice, too; the soldiers here save lives, don't take them, don't harm them. Maybe if we're leaping to applications from a single verse, we should leap to say this is a mandate on state power, too.

But Luke continues:

***Just Before Dawn:***

They're in a fog, they can't see the sky, storm is all around them, and they only know they're being driven to land, which nearly always means driven to death. The sailors were executing their plan in the double-dark of a storm, but things begin to lighten now. And we read:

***33 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. 34 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.” 35 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. 36 They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. 37 Altogether there were 276 of us on board. 38 When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.***

This passage intentionally echoes things that for some of us come immediately to mind when we hear it read. Remember Acts is the second of what we ought to think of as a Two-volume set: Luke and Acts together. And what some of us hear when this is read are passages that Luke himself wrote in the Gospel of Luke. What Luke writes today sounds enormously like what Jesus says as he breaks bread in Luke 9, and miraculously feeds over 5,000 people, it sounds like what Jesus said when he gathered with his first followers as the Last Supper, the night of his arrest.

### ***Just Before Dawn: Like Jesus***

This isn't an accident. First of all, Paul knows these stories, has embodied these stories. He's making symbolic points here. And Luke is carrying that symbolism to us, too. In this moment, for those on this ship, Paul is acting like Jesus. These are people whose rescue God has promised to Paul as a personal, gracious gift. And just as Jesus prayed, "I haven't lost any of the ones you've given to me," Paul wants to be able to pray it, too. Paul is acting like Christ for them all, modeling and reminding us at least, Luke and Aristarchus as least, of Jesus' own providence and rescue to all humanity. This is a little salvation moment, a small reproduction of all Jesus did for humanity. Paul doesn't seem to be doing a miracle here, although he echoes one. He doesn't seem to be doing communion, although he echoes the Last Supper. He's just providing for them, and for those who have eyes to see (for those who are rescued who will someday look back on this moment and remember it) a chance to connect this desperate moment to Jesus' rescue.

### ***Just Before Dawn: Authority & Influence***

Here's what I love: Paul is an authority, of course. Julius and the soldiers are taking his lead, now. The

pilot and ship-owner are at least along for the ride--literally. The sailors seem to listen. Luke and Aristarchus have followed him for years. But the source of Paul's authority is his confidence and trust in God. He doesn't have any economic or civic position on this ship. He doesn't have a useful degree. He only has his confidence that God will keep the promises God has made to him. It's out of this confidence that he speaks. And those who hear him listen because they sense his confidence. And I think that in all the groups we're in, even if we have title-based authority, are bosses or owners or founders or professors or parents or pastors--in all the groups we're in, when we lose our confidence that God will keep the promises God has made, then we will lose our ability to influence those around us. Which means only this: Nurturing our own relationship with God matters for us no matter what groups we're a part of and what those groups value, because our confidence in God will bring us confidence in all things, knowing, as we do, that God will work them out for our good.

So they eat, and they toss away the rest of the grain. They have no food left. All they have is hopeful trust in the promise Paul just gave them.



**Daybreak:**

They settle in for the night, and daybreak comes.

They crash, but are saved. The kindness Julius showed Luke continues, and saves his friends, too. We read this, to end the chapter:

***39 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. 40 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. 41 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.***

***42 The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. 43 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. 44 The rest***

***were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.***

All are saved, just as God promised Paul they would be.

***Conclusion:***

In today's scene there's something about gratitude and trust that we could notice. Paul gives thanks. They eat. And they throw out the rest of the grain. This is more than just pragmatic. It's trusting Paul, and in turn God, enough to believe that they won't need food, not because they're going to die, but because they're going to live. They've needed the space all along, but they've been hanging on to this bit, just in case. The end is coming, and they're making a choice to eat and trust Paul's word that they don't need to keep a "just in case" anymore. The end is coming, and it won't be their end.

***Conclusion: Revealing Trust:***

After Paul leads the ship in giving thanks, all aboard reveal their trust by throwing the rest of their food overboard. And this lines up with the truth that thanksgiving in its fullest expression, is a two-step act: First,

giving voice to the God we trust, because we believe God ought to be thanked for any sustaining, saving, healing, blessing provision that comes our way. Second, responding.

We give thanks to God, as Paul does here, because we trust that God ought to be thanked for any sustaining, saving, healing, blessing provision that comes our way. And then, taking a posture of trust, we act.

Paul's remarkable, because he's leading the entire ship in this. He leads out of his own trusting relationship with God. For those of us in positions of leadership and influence, we ought to particularly consider the implications of that, but for all of us it's relevant. And I think what this passage does is invite us to consider a few questions, and figure out how to answer them well:

What shall we give thanks for? When?  
What will we do after we give thanks?

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Giving thanks, in its fullest sense, reveals our trust in

God. And that trust, that trusting relationship with God, will always reveal itself in taking action. Past a certain age, we don't get to just say "Thanks," and run away to do what we want to do.

Today, the crew is led in thanks-giving, and then casts their entire hope for safety on this God Paul trusts. Our acts after giving thanks may not be that big, but there ought to be some sort of response to a God who rescues, heals, helps, saves, and provides for us.

Right now God is rescuing us, healing us, helping us, saving us, and providing for us. Right now we're in need in particular ways, our hearts and minds and bodies and relationships need God's help, and there are always metaphorical rocks we're scared of crashing into. And if not us, someone we care for. Giving thanks and showing thanks through our trusting behaviors are two sides of the same coin, but it's our Christian currency, our means of exchange in the Kingdom of God. Let's at least take advantage of a whole holiday to consider these questions.