

## ***Acts 27:13-26: To Rome; “Ends” Continues V: Stormy Weather***

### ***Remember:***

Last week was the first leg of Paul’s trip to Rome. He went with Luke and Aristarchus, with Julius the Centurion, sailors and soldiers. They came up against the limits of the sailing season, but wanted to try to at least make it to Phoenix, a port city on the West side of the island Crete. Paul didn’t want to go; he wanted to stay put on the southern side of the Island, but he was out-voted. And reasonably so, all things considered: He’s no sailor. We leapt from here to talk about how we react when we’re right, but no one listens to us. Because Paul was right in his opinions here.

Today we’ll talk about the second leg of their journey to Italy, and just how much goes wrong. Paul will again share his opinion, but this time it’s more than opinion; it’s backed up by a direct message from God about what’s to come. I think today’s passage invites us to consider some basic Christian mandates, and I’m looking forward to talking about them.

As with last week, we’ll walk through what we see in

this smaller passage. First, let's pray!

### **Prayer:**

#### **Leaving Fair Havens:**

And so we catch up with Paul and all the rest on this ship of nearly 300 people that set sail from Alexandria Egypt, as they leave Fair Havens. And things start out promising. We read, ***“When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete.”***

But things quickly fall apart from here.

#### **Northeaster:**

14 Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. 15 The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. 16 As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, 17 so the men hoisted it aboard.

Cauda is an island that doesn't show up on the map I

gave us today. It's south of the west side of Crete, 30 miles or so. To pass to the "lee" of something means to be downwind of something. If the wind blows from the west, you're on the east. What this all means is that they tried to sail northwest, and ended up being blown directly south, not even able to think about making it to Cauda, and safety. Things are beginning to fall apart; the lifeboat, which wasn't a raft, was a ship in its own right, it needs hauled up and in. It doesn't matter if it's in the way, because they can't do anything anyway. And the crew begins to worry about the ship. They begin to spin toward the west, and worry about running aground in a shallow bay off Libya.

Luke writes:

***Giving Up Hope:***

***Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor[b] and let the ship be driven along. 18 We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. 19 On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle***

***overboard with their own hands. 20 When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.***

They're doing everything they can to make the ship as light as possible, in the hope that somehow they won't sink. They're hoping that somehow they'll be stopped before they're driven aground. And look at this map. I love this map. Someone pointed out something hilarious to me this week that I just saw past the week before.

***Map: point out the way the northeaster would circle the ocean, the way the squiggly lines show***

The long and short of this is this: They're lost. They have nothing. Luke writes, "we finally gave up all hope of being saved."

And into this hopeless situation, God speaks.

***"Keep Up Your Courage"***

***21 After they had gone a long time without***

***food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. 22 But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. 23 Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ 25 So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. 26 Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.”***

I'll read the whole thing again, for us:

***21 After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. 22 But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. 23 Last night an angel of the God to***

***whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' 25 So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. 26 Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."***

### ***In Fair Havens vs. Now:***

Last week we talked about all the worst responses we can have when we're right and people won't listen to us. I invited us to think about why we respond so poorly to people when they won't take our beautiful advice, and suggested that if we can't act with faith and hope and love toward them, we may as well do nothing. It's a weak second-choice, but it's better than gloating or antagonism. Last week we saw as Paul gave advice no one should have listened to. It was just advice. He wasn't an expert. He was just a guy giving his advice.

Today is different, though. Paul is still no expert. But there is something that upstages expertise: A direct word from God. When Paul speaks today, he doesn't

speaking from a place of ignorance, no matter how invested he is; he speaks from a place of special, direct revelation. They're lost. The sky is so wracked by the storm they can't see the stars, and even if they could: their rigging has all been thrown overboard, along with everything else. They've gone "a long time" without food, but it's unclear how long, and Paul stands and speaks. An angel came to him last night, he says, which implies some sort of dream-visitation, but could have been otherwise.

How we take Paul's first sentence is determined by how much or how little we ourselves are ready to gloat over others. Let's assume Paul doesn't have the insecure need to prove himself right that so many of us have. He says to all of them, lost on the cloudy sea,

***"Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. 22 But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. 23 Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has***

***graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ 25 So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. 26 Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.””***

Paul has heard from God through an angelic messenger. They will run aground. They will lose the ship, as they’ve lost everything on it. But the entire company--the crew, the captain, the owner; Julius, Luke, Aristarchus, and the soldiers with them, they’ll all be saved. This is good news. But it’s news that someday these saved ones will need to reflect on. They are saved for Paul’s sake; or at least, if it weren’t for Paul’s presence, there would be no salvation. “God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you,” Paul hears. The salvation of this crew is a gift to Paul, from the God Paul makes very clear he serves. Why this gift? I don’t know; a chance, maybe, for Paul to return the kindness Julius offered him early in their voyage. Maybe we simply shouldn’t ask too much when we’re given amazing gifts, but receive them as such.

And Luke doesn’t let us lose the thread of the plot he’s weaving, here, either: All will be saved as a gift to



Paul, but Paul himself will be saved because he must appear before Caesar, must arrive in Rome as God intends for him.

And unlike last week's passage, there are a few things I think today's naturally leads us to consider.

### ***Conclusion: Wrong Together***

Sometimes it's simply the case that we're wrong together. We're wrong together. We make the best decisions we think we can make as a group--families, congregations, organizations, clubs, and teams--we make the best decisions we can make, choose as wisely as we think we can choose with the information we have, and we lose. We choose poorly. We make the wrong call.

We're wrong together.

In that situation, those of us who "serve the god Paul serves" ought to invite the help of that God. Beg for it. Pray for it. Whatever. Maybe there will be rescue, as there is today. The greatest common mercy is when we make a bad choice or choices and don't have to experience the negative effects of that choice.

## ***Conclusion: The Company We Keep, Kindness We Show:***

I think a simple thing this passage could help us remember is that sometimes it is who you know, the company you keep, that means your salvation. I mean, this is true in the most religious sense: It's keeping company with Christ that means salvation for us.

But when we read or hear "being saved" in today's passage, it's a far less religious meaning, although of course the echo of religious salvation isn't absent. What Luke means most basically when he writes "being saved" is "being rescued," a valid translation of the phrase. And the truth is that we ought to keep good company, because sometimes it's the company we keep that means we're rescued, saved, helped, blessed.

I think of Julius here. His salvation, his rescue, is wrapped up in the kindness he has offered Paul, in Paul's presence with him. And all sorts of stories in the Bible, both true stories and parables, speak to the idea that our blessings comes as an accidental result of the blessing we offer others, our help and rescue and healing and blessing come as an unlooked-for side-

effect of the help, rescue, healing, and blessing we offer others. We are often helped, rescued, healed not because of what we've done, but because of the company we've kept or because of who we've aligned ourselves with. We see common kindness turn into salvation entirely aside from our motives or desire for reward.

The other side of this is that who knows if someday God will save, help, heal, rescue others just because they're with us. Maybe stewarding our closeness to God, tending our faith, is important because of how God will use us to help, heal, rescue others. God's gift to Paul of those who are on the ship with him as nothing to do with what Paul does, but everything to do with the relationship God and Paul have. If we nurture our relationship with God, who knows who might be saved because of it, who God might graciously give to us, not for our purposes but God's?

### ***Conclusion: Offering Specific Hope***

But building on this, there's something incredibly concrete in today's passage that we can do.

Paul offers hope that those on the ship will be saved. He has a very handy thing when it comes to offering

hope, which is a direct, specific word from God that no one the ship is going to be harmed.

We don't always have such a specific promise, but we do always have situations in which those around us need hope. And I think it's within the powers and tasks that God has given those who serve Him, those who follow Christ, to speak to those around us with hope. We offer the hope of healing, salvation, rescue in specific ways to those who need it. And I think the specificity really matters.

I don't care, if I'm hungry, that Jesus will come back some day. If I'm starving, I care that I'll be fed. I don't care, if I'm drowning and need lifted from the water that if I die I'll be at peace; I care that you lift me out of the water. I don't care, when I'm facing a mountain of debts, that the world to come is one in which the only debt that exists is a continual debt of love. I care that my bills be paid, somehow. The hope for someone whose homeless is a home, who's hungry is food, who's sick is healing, and I think that if we're modeling Paul in today's passage, what we have to offer people is specific hope. We don't lie; we don't promise what we can't promise, but if, like Paul, we can say something about the future with confidence, then I

think we say it. Because Christ compels us to say it.

And we can link this to the other points I've made. If we can do something to make that hope realized--with our cash, our time, our skill--we do it. I think we invite the network of people we're a part of to do the same, and in so doing, we don't make the wrong choice together, but an easy right choice to give help together to those around us.

And, if we're honest, hope that goes unfulfilled isn't hope at all. The idea of rescue isn't rescue; the mental image of provision isn't provision. Salvation without Jesus' resurrection as proof it'll happen is just a nice idea that motivates on happy days. If we're going to offer hope to people who need it, we need to make that hope concrete in the help we give them, too. Paul gave his word and his presence; and we'll see how his word of hope is realized next week, because he didn't let anyone leave his presence. We can do the same.

### ***Conclusion:***

So again: the second leg of Paul's journey. We'll see safety--salvation--come next week, though not without costs. But I think today's passage invites us to remember that we sometimes can make the wrong

choice together, even when we think we're making the right one. And it's up to those of us who serve God to pray that good will be made of our choice, rather than something terrible. We're invited to consider how the company we keep, or the kindness we show, can result in our own salvation, our own rescue, our own help or healing. And we're reminded that we are meant to be people who offer hope in specific, relevant ways to those who need it, and make that hope concrete with our presence and whatever power we're able to muster.