

PRAYER

Gracious God, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Help us to recognize your presence alongside us, as we review scripture today. Speak to us the words we need most to hear. We ask this in the name of Jesus, the Living Word.

Amen.

We're Not There Yet!

A little background leading up to our reading of Acts 27:

Paul has been languishing under house arrest in Herod's palace at Caesarea by the Sea. He has not been charged with any crime. He has appeared before three different Roman governors during that time (Felix, Festus and Agrippa) but none of them have been able to determine any Roman law he has broken, aside from the many unsubstantiated accusations hurled at him by the Jews. This has caused a stalemate in the proceedings causing Paul's continued confinement because the Roman officials fear that the Jewish leaders will create trouble if he is released.

Paul breaks this logjam by demanding, as a Roman citizen, his right to appeal his case to Cesar's court in Rome. This frees him from an undetermined amount of time spent in confinement at Caesarea, provides a resolution for his case in the Roman judicial system and distances him from the murderous Jews in Jerusalem who want him killed.

Once again we see Luke's attention to social and historical detail as he chronicles Paul's voyage to Rome. He names the centurion, Julius, and the Augustan cohort he commanded who acted much like city police force or OPP Officers and the RCMP, working across various lines of law enforcement. They were responsible for communications between Rome and its armies in foreign lands as well as the transfer of prisoners as was the case here.

Like travel today where you can't always get a direct flight to your destination but have to have a connecting flight, during that time you could not sail directly to Italy from a port in Judea or Syria.

Today's scripture reading is a bit unusual.

It's the second to last chapter in the book of Acts. We know Acts was written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke, and we can think of him reading these passages to us. The Gospel outlines the life and ministry of Jesus, while the book of Acts records the growth of the church after the resurrection.

Acts chapter 27, however, is a bit odd. It reads like an amateur travelogue, like the slide shows in our livingrooms years ago, or stories told by a distant relative. There are not many people we know in these versus. Many of the place names seem meaningless. So we are going to have a bit of fun this morning, and are going to dissect the scripture, to try to understand a bit more about Paul's journey.

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Let's listen to Luke...

As soon as arrangements were complete for our sailing to Italy, Paul and a few other prisoners were placed under the supervision of a centurion named Julius, a member of an elite guard.

We boarded a ship that originated from **Adramitium**, that was bound for Ephesus and ports west.

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The next day we put in at **Sidon**. Julius treated Paul most decently—let him get off the ship and enjoy the hospitality of his friends there.

Out to sea again, we sailed north under the protection of the northeast shore of Cyprus because winds out of the west were against us, and then along the coast westward to the port of **Myra**.

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There, the centurion found an Egyptian ship headed for Italy and transferred us on board. We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off **Cnidus**.

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We ran into bad weather ...(rain)... and found it impossible to stay on course.

Auto Slide

After much difficulty, we finally made it to the southern coast of the island of **Crete** and docked at Good Harbour near **Fair Havens**.

By this point we had lost a lot of time. We had passed the autumn equinox, so it would be stormy weather ...(rain)... from now on through the winter, too dangerous for sailing. Paul warned, "I see only disaster ahead for cargo and ship—to say nothing of our lives!—if we put out to sea now." But it was not the best harbour for staying the winter.

Auto Slide

Phoenix, a few miles further on, was more suitable. The centurion set Paul's warning aside and let the ship captain and the shipowner talk him into trying for the next harbor.

When a gentle southerly breeze came up, they weighed anchor, thinking it would be smooth sailing. But they were no sooner out to sea than a gale-force wind, struck. They lost all control of the ship. It was a cork in the **storm. (rain)**

Auto Slide

We came under the lee of the small island named **Clauda** and managed to get a lifeboat ready and reef the sails. But rocky shoals prevented us from getting close. We only managed to avoid them by throwing out drift anchors.

Next day, out on the high seas again and badly damaged now by **the storm (rain)**, we dumped the cargo overboard.

Auto Slide

The third day the sailors lightened the ship further by throwing off all the tackle and provisions.

It had been many days since we had seen either sun or stars. Wind and waves were battering us unmercifully, and we lost all hope of rescue. With our appetite for both food and life long gone, Paul took his place in our midst and said,

“Friends, you really should have listened to me back in **Crete**. We could have avoided all this trouble and trial. But there’s no need to dwell on that now. From now on, things are looking up! I can assure you that there’ll not be a single drowning among us, although I can’t say as much for the ship... “Last night God’s angel stood at my side, an angel of this God I serve, saying to me, ‘Don’t give up, Paul. You’re going to stand before Caesar yet—and everyone sailing with you is also going to make it.’ So, dear friends, take heart. I believe God will do exactly what he told me. But we’re going to shipwreck on some island or other.”

On the fourteenth night, adrift somewhere on the **Adriatic Sea**, at about midnight the sailors sensed that we were approaching land. Sounding, they measured a depth of 120 feet, and shortly after that, ninety feet. Afraid that we were about to run aground, they threw out four anchors and prayed for daylight. Some of the sailors tried to jump ship. ...

With dawn about to break, Paul called everyone together and proposed breakfast: “This is the fourteenth day we’ve gone without food. None of us has felt like eating! But I urge you to eat something now. You’ll need strength for the rescue ahead. You’re going to come out of this without even a scratch!” He broke the bread, gave thanks to God, passed it around, and they all ate heartily—276 of us, all told!

At daybreak, no one recognized the land—but then they did notice a bay with a nice beach. They decided to try to run the ship up on the beach. They cut the anchors, loosed the tiller, raised the sail, and ran before the wind toward the beach. But ... we didn’t make it. Still far from shore, we hit a reef and the ship began to break up.

The soldiers decided to kill the prisoners so none could escape by swimming, but the centurion, determined to save Paul, stopped them. He gave orders for anyone who could swim to dive in and go for it, and for the rest to grab a plank. Everyone made it to shore safely.

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Once, we were safely ashore, we found out this island was **Malta**, under the muttering of “are we there yet?”

Title Slide

So, that's the scripture—a long and strange story. We didn't even cover the whole trip in that passage! This tale goes on for another fourteen verses in the next chapter, until finally, Paul makes it to Rome. You have to wonder why Luke included so much detail in this story. Why did the early church not chop this story down or even out of the Bible? Why not summarize it in a few lines? Any of us could do that: Paul got on a boat for Rome. There was some pretty rough sailing and even a shipwreck. No one died, and he finally made it. Instead, the author of Acts drags on for 58 verses. The story takes up 6% of the Book of Acts. Why? Why wasn't this story thrown out when the early church was piecing together writings to be kept, shared, and read for generations to come?

Friends, the answer is not difficult. This story was kept because this is our story: the story of the church, the story of the life of faith. How many of us have had the experience of expecting a day, a week, the next chapter in our lives to go one way, and we are thrown a curveball, one after another? A death, a divorce, a conflict, a pandemic. How many of us know the feeling of being lost at sea... no stars, no sun to guide us? How many of us here today have had the experience of hearing someone say, "I told you so," and whether we admit it or not, we know they were right? How many of us have not seen an angel or heard an angel's voice, but have leaned into the faith of someone who has, when the way was dark?

This is a long Bible reading with a lot of place names, but we have kept it, we have held on to it, because it is not just a travelogue. This is our story, the story of this church we love. Our journey is a journey together. It is a venture which is fraught with storms, and smart alics, times when we've been completely off course, and moments when we have had to let go of things that we hold dear, like those sailors dumping cargo.

There have been, and there will continue to be times when we are weary, and worn out, and all we can do is break bread together and pray. But this is our story, and God is still charting the course.

Presbyterians Sharing is a foundational way that we proclaim the deep truth that we travel together as people of faith, and God is charting the course.

In a world filled with prejudice and injustice, we work to help refugees and those who are struggling find a way forward through our support of **Action Refugees and Tyndale St-Georges Community Centre in Montreal.**

In a society where young people are inundated with a storm of social media and materialism, we continue to believe in and invest in young people through Christian camping, youth ministries like **Uplift**, and **Youth in Mission.**

Recognizing the hurt and pain that settler people and colonization have caused the Indigenous people of Canada, we straighten our sail and realize we must change course. We have confessed the church's role in running residential schools, its complicity in the harms of colonization, and rejected the **Doctrine of Discovery.** We are committed to walking toward reconciliation.

Know the intergeneration impact of residential schools, we support the healing ministries of **Anamiewigummig Fellowship Centre in Kenora Ontario, Winnipeg Inner City Missions, Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry, Edmonton Urban Native Ministry, and Hummingbird Ministries in Vancouver, B.C.**

At a time when fear and racism are rampant, we commit to live by faith—supporting new church plants, renewing established congregations, training new ministers in Canada and across the globe, daring to stand up for the most vulnerable, and pointing toward a way of peace.

Sometimes, we might feel like we are in **Myra** where there's changes in direction, or **Crete**, where you feel its better late than never, or even in the middle of the **Adriatic Sea**, where you can't give up. But we are reminded again and again that God is with us in this journey. Today's scripture is not a travelogue, it's not a story we can slough off as unimportant. This is our story, and God will not let it end even if we find ourselves worried on a beach in **Malta. Because we're not there yet!**

Thanks be to God. Amen.





