

5th Sunday after Pentecost  
July 5, 2009  
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY  
Acts 27:13-26  
Pastor Paul Horn

“I have faith in God... it will happen... just as he told me.”

13 When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. 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 When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor 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.

21 After the men 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 whose I am 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.”

The Apostle Paul made his third missionary journey through the areas of Greece and Turkey. The purpose of the trip was to gather an offering for the Christian congregation in Jerusalem, which was suffering from persecution. After Paul encouraged the saints in Jerusalem with the offering and stories of his trip, he went to worship at the temple. Some Jews from the province of Greece happened to be in town, saw Paul at the temple, and immediately their blood began to boil. Those same Jews had driven Paul out of many towns in Greece. They did not like Paul’s message about Jesus, who came to do away with all the Mosaic ceremonies and offerings. These Jews stirred up whole city, proclaiming that Paul was teaching everyone everywhere against the Jewish people and its laws and against the temple. A riotous crowd was about to tear Paul to pieces when Roman soldiers came in and rescued Paul, hauling him into their barracks. Remember that at that time Rome had control over the territory of Judea and Roman garrisons were positioned all over Palestine to keep peace in this volatile province. Kept for questioning, the religious leaders of the Jews brought charges against Paul, but ended up arguing with each other and got no where...except that they agreed on a plot to assassinate Paul as he was en route to court the next day. Paul discovered their plot and in an overnight covert operation the Roman garrison commander transferred his prisoner to Caesarea for safekeeping.

Caesarea is 55 miles northwest of Jerusalem on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. There Paul sat for two years, kept in custody; no trial, no sentencing. Finally, a man by name of Festus replaced Felix as the governor of the region. Three days after he was put in office, the Jews came to him. "Do us a favor as the new governor. Do something about this Paul character." Paul defended himself, pointing out that he had done nothing wrong. Seeing that this was going nowhere he proclaimed, "I appeal to Caesar!" Festus had no choice but to send him to Rome and defend himself before Caesar. This is where our story picks up.

Paul, with other prisoners, was put in custody of a centurion named Julius for the voyage to Rome. We learn from Acts that a man by the name of Aristarchus and Luke, the author of Acts, accompanied the apostle. During the journey they were transferred to a large Alexandrian grain ship from Egypt bound for Rome. Shortly after this the ship's crew encountered unfavorable winds and were forced to sail under the southern part of the island of Crete. Paul advised the centurion to winter in a port called Fair Havens. He was quickly overruled by the centurion and the captain of the ship, who decided to take a risk and sail to a better harbor of Phoenix.

Remember that they were sailing in the winter. Luke tells us it was after "the Fast," the Jewish Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, which was in late September or early October. The usual sailing season was from May to September. Sailing after September was doubtful and after November was suicidal. And so, the ship was hit by hurricane (Luke calls it the northeaster), and the ship was swept down from island south to the dreaded shallows to the southwest (between Cyrene and Carthage). They managed to change direction to the northwest. But when the fury of the storm did not let up, the crew threw cargo overboard, the ship's gear, even the grain to lighten the ship. The sailors had to pass ropes under the ship to keep the planks of the hull from springing apart. The storm continued for days. The sailors could not see the light of day or the stars at night, which they needed to navigate, and no wonder Luke records, "We gave up hope of being saved," all of them except Paul that is.

On the fourteenth day of the storm Paul stood up before the people of the ship and said, "You should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete." This was not a "I told you so," but, "Please don't make another costly mistake like the last one." He then encouraged them to cheer up. Cheer up? That would have gotten their attention. An angel of God had appeared to him the night before and told him he must stand trial before Caesar and for the sake of Paul's life God would spare the lives of all on the ship. The bad news was the ship would run aground some island, the cargo lost and ship destroyed, but the good news is that they would all live.

Paul had faith in God's promise to him, despite what his eyes saw and his churning stomach felt, despite the fact that everyone else had lost hope because of that storm, Paul put his faith in God's promise. That's why he could say, "I am convinced that it will happen, for I have put my trust in my God."

Illustration: Have you ever seen him? The little boy standing on the edge of the diving board, staring down at his father who is treading water below him saying, "Jump! I will catch you." He hears his father, but isn't really listening. He's looking at everything else, the depth of the pool, the other kids waiting behind him. He even may have watched others go before him, children younger and smaller than he. Still he refuses to jump.

That's you and me. Everyday we stand at the end of the diving board, ready to jump into the next day, take a leap in the next major step in life, and your Heavenly Father is there saying to you with outstretched arms, "I will catch you." In Psalm 37:23,24 he promises, "The man who trusts

in me will not fall even though he may stumble, I will uphold him with my hand.” We hear God’s promises, we read about the heroes of faith in the Bible, men like Paul, Noah, Samson and Gideon, women like Deborah, Rahab, and Esther, we see faithful believers we know personally, all who had their own troubles, yet they could all say with conviction, “I have faith in my God’s promises.” And yet so often we do not step out in faith...

...and if we do, then we are like Peter, who saw the waves and wind and started to sink because he did not keep his focus on his Savior’s promise. Sometimes we are like the disciples who were terrified in that storm on the Sea of Galilee, even though the One who scooped out that sea with his hand was sitting in their boat. Are we like the disciples who did not trust, even though they had witnessed Jesus’ power when he cured a man of his terminal disease (leprosy) and drove demons from the possessed and healed Simon’s sick mother-in-law?

Why is it so hard for us to say those words, “I have faith in God?” Shouldn’t we be able to say it freely, without embarrassment? Why does it at times seem so difficult to do it? Why do we sometimes even fail to say it? Perhaps it is because we fail to petition God for the courage of faith. James tells us, “You do not have because you do not ask.” (James 4:2) Then shame on us for not asking.

I readily confess that Jesus died for my sins, yes, that is true, and in this I put my hope for all eternity. But to trust God’s promise to stand by me as I recover from an illness, his promise to give me strength from my loss of job or my investments tanking, I’m not so convinced. He promises to provide all that I need to keep my body and life, yet when I look at my check book and poor stewardship habits, I’m not so convinced of that promise. He promises to be generous to me when I am generous with my wallet or purse, yet I’m reluctant. He promises to send the Holy Spirit to stand next to me when I share the good news of Jesus with a friend, but I’m not always so convinced he will. He promises to rescue me from death itself, but when I am about to face it, I have my doubts.

Why is it that we have such a hard time saying with Paul, “I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me?” Because too often we look at how deep the water is, we look at the wind and waves of life, the unexpected storms that rise up, and we fail to look up at Jesus. We sink because we do not daily put his promises before our eyes, then we are terrified to take that jump off the diving board, because we do not trust. I should be more afraid of is my God who threatens me with death and punishment for not trusting in him than what the future holds.

But my friends, what happens when we put our faith in our Savior, if we redirect the eyes of faith to focus on Christ...what do we see? What will we hear?

...ah, there! When we look at Him then we see a blood stained cross, blood that poured out and drained the life of our Savior, a life that was given up in my place, for my sins of doubt and unbelief. At the cross we hear the God-Man cry out from the cross, “It is finished!” The punishment for my sins of failing to trust in my God’s promises was inflicted upon Jesus Christ, and was completed on Calvary. We see an empty tomb, God’s promise that my tomb will one day be vacant. We hear the Savior say, “Because I live, you also will live.” (John 14:19) We hear Jesus say, “Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:40) Listen to His promises so that you might chase away your doubts and trust him.

When you doubt, when you are afraid, redirect your eyes of faith to the font, where Christ made a promise to you, to drown all your sins and raise you to life eternal through water and the Word. When you feel that you are drowning in the storms of life, come to the Lord's Table, where he reassures you, "You will leave uplifted by my true body and blood, strengthened by this holy meal through which I offer you forgiveness and life."

That's why the apostle Paul had so much confidence. Yes, he had the privilege of having an angel appear to him. But more importantly, God had declared to Paul that he was his Savior and that his sins were forgiven through baptism, and that death had been sunk to the depths of the sea by his resurrection. Paul had no doubt God would also keep this promise to save him and this ship's crew from this storm.

So...you probably want to know what happened in the rest of the story, huh? The day after Paul spoke to the ships passengers, on the fifteenth day in that storm, the ship ran aground a sandbar a distance from the island of Malta, off the southern tip of Sicily. The ship was smashed to pieces by the pounding surf, but Luke records that all 276 passengers on board floated on pieces from the ship or swam safely to shore. It will happen...just as He told me.

Now this does not mean we can go through life, footloose and fancy free. We cannot jump off the roof of our house and say, "I have faith that God will catch me." We cannot sit on our butts and not do outreach and say, "I have faith that God will bring the unchurched to our congregation." We cannot quit our jobs and say, "I have faith God will provide." There is a reason why God has given us the ability to work. There is a reason why God gave us the gift of common sense. But when you're standing on the edge of the diving board, ready to take a big jump in your life, or jump to the next day, put your faith and trust in Christ. Put your confidence in the guarantees he has made known to you through his Holy Scriptures. And if you don't know what those promises are, make a commitment to become familiar with them through daily Bible study, so that when the storms of life rise up, and they will if they have not already, and you feel like your drowning, and you will if you have not already, and when you are ready to close your eyes in death, you will put your confidence in Christ and say with conviction, "I have faith in God. It will happen, just as he told me." Amen.

In His Service,

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"The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen!" 2Timothy 4:18