

## Lost in the sea of self

Text: Acts 27:13-26 for 6/24/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

Theme: Lost in the sea of self

Don't you hate it when people say, "I told you so?" But what can be worse is when you are expecting them to say it and they don't. I dealt with a situation like that several years ago. It all started when the ship I was sailing stopped in Myra to pick up cargo and passengers. Myra is a town on the southern shore of the country you call Turkey. As the captain of the ship it was my responsibility to make sure that the ship was properly prepared for ever part of the trip. I especially wanted to do a good job on this trip because the ship's owner was on board. I knew if I could impress him he might increase my pay.

As the passengers were boarding a Roman centurion named Julius brought a prisoner on board, a man by the name of Paul. I'm always a little leery of taking on prisoners, and wanted to make sure this guy wasn't dangerous. Julius assured me he wasn't. Julius said Paul was a Jew who had become a leader of a religious group called Christians. He said Christians believed a man name Jesus Christ was God's Son and that this Jesus came into the world to save people. So Paul traveled around telling people about Jesus.

I knew about Judaism. There were plenty of Jews in Alexandria, Egypt, where I had grown up. I knew what they believed and taught about God, but I never heard of Christians. So I asked Julius, "Why is he a prisoner?" It seems some Jews accused Paul before Governor Festus of desecrating their temple but they couldn't give any hard evidence. When Festus asked Paul to be tried in Jerusalem Paul, being a Roman citizen, appealed to Caesar. "Well, he sounds harmless enough," I said.

I was never very religious. Religion always seemed to get in the way of what I wanted to do. Besides, what had God ever done for me? It was all my hard work and my determination that got me to where I wanted to be: the captain of a ship. Where was God as I was plotting my course and working my way up through the ranks? No, I didn't have much use for religion.

Leaving Myra we headed west toward Italy, but we had a rough time traveling. The weather was getting worse with winter approaching. After struggling to make progress we finally made port on the south side of the Island of Crete, at a place called Fair Haven. The harbor wasn't the best, and we did not want to spend the winter there. I started talking to the owner and the crew about moving the ship to Phoenix on the west end of Crete. It had a better harbor for the ship and better accommodations for the rest of us.

But as we were talking about moving this guy Paul walks up and says, **"Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also"** (Acts 27:10). Who is this guy kidding? He's not a sailor! I have sailed these waters plenty of times. With the right wind we could easily get to Phoenix. These religious nuts, always proclaiming some message of gloom and doom. Thankfully, no one was persuaded by Paul's ranting, and we decided to move on. When a gentle south wind began to blow I knew we had exactly what we wanted. I could use that wind to easily sail down the coast to Phoenix. So we set out immediately.

We had not gone far, though, before the wind started to pick up and clouds started to build above the island. I didn't think anything of it at first; I guess I was too busy thinking about getting to Phoenix and having some time to relax. But then it hit. The "Northeaster" came on us so hard and fast that it caught us completely by surprise. I've sailed through plenty of storms, but I had never seen anything like this one. Immediately I started putting into action everything I knew to handle a situation like this. We secured the life boat, and ran ropes under the ship to keep the boards secure in the pounding of the waves. Then, after tying the

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rudder straight, we lowered the sea anchor, which was a large canvas rigging that dragged behind the ship to slow it down. "This will certainly do it," I thought. But the next day the wind and waves were worse, and the ship was starting to take on water. Something had to be done to lighten the ship, so we started throwing the cargo overboard. Another day went by with no relief. Now we were throwing over everything we didn't need, the ship's tackle, sails, and rigging, anything to make the ship lighter. We kept one small sail and hoped the storm would subside. But it didn't. Day after day we saw nothing but clouds. No sun, no stars to tell us where we were or which way to go. We had done everything we possibly could. Now there was nothing we could do. The storm was in control, which meant we were out of control. We tried to save ourselves, but we realized we couldn't. This was it. We simply gave up all hope of being saved.

I've been in some tough situations before, but nothing like this. I knew I was going to die. That thought scared me. For so long I had fought to be in control and live life my way. I had never done anything to prepare for death. Sure, when I was younger I had heard about God, I had been told about God, but I never had any use for God. I wanted to be in control of my destiny, but now everything was out of my control. Have you ever felt that way, like everything was out of control and out of your control? Maybe you even wondered if God could help in a situation like that.

I started to think about my life. I had done a few good things in my life, yet I couldn't get out of my head all of the mistakes I had made; all the people I had hurt as I worked my way up the ladder of success. Was God angry with me because of that? Was this God's way of punishing me for all of the bad things I had done in my life? I had heard from some Jews that God was holy and all-powerful. I guess God would certainly have the right and the authority to punish me for the things I had done wrong. I felt so lost and hopeless.

Then I remembered what that Paul had said. Somehow Paul seemed to know we were going to run into trouble. How did he know that? Maybe Paul knew something about God that I should know. So I went to talk to him. I found him sitting below deck with his traveling companions. He looked completely calm as if nothing was wrong. I asked if I could talk to him and he invited me to sit with them. I told Paul what I had been thinking about and how I thought God was punishing me for what I had done wrong. Then I asked Paul, "Is there something I can do to appease God, something that will make him happy with me? What can I do so God won't be angry with me?"

Paul said to me, "**The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth [...] He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else**" (Acts 17:24-25). Paul went on to speak of how the people of this world rebelled against God and in doing so condemned themselves to eternal death. God knew there was nothing people could do to save themselves from this eternal punishment, so God put a plan in motion to save the people of this world. God sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to live the life we all should have lived. Then Jesus willingly sacrificed his sinless life to pay for the sins of all people. Paul told me, "**[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification**" (Romans 4:25). "**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him**" (John 3:16-17). Then Paul looked right at me and said, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be**

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**saved”** (Acts 16:31).

I wasn't sure what to say. I wasn't sure what to think. So God gave up his own Son to save me? God allowed his Son, Jesus, to die in my place so that I would not have to die eternally? Some of what Paul said sounded so strange, yet what was equally as strange was that I believed him. It was clear that I couldn't save myself. But according to what Paul said I didn't have to because God himself saved me.

I had been so lost, lost in the sea of myself. I was so wrapped up in my own little world and what I wanted that I lost sight of God; I had wandered away from him. But God sent his Son, Jesus, to seek me out and to save me. God sent his Son to calm the storm in my soul. Trusting in Jesus, and the forgiveness he won for me, I now knew I was right with God. So even if this voyage ended in my death at least I could die in peace, knowing I am right with God and that eternal life would be waiting for me.

What Paul had told me gave me comfort over the next few days. Nothing had changed as far as our outward circumstances were concerned: the storm still raged, we were still completely lost. Yet, none of that bothered me anymore. It simply reminded me that even though I'm not in control, God is, so I would leave my life in the hands of my Savior.

But the next day Paul stood up and said something surprising. He said, **“Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me 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.’ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island”** (vs. 21-26).

And that is exactly what happened. After fourteen days of being driven across the sea we were able to get the ship into a bay on the island of Malta. The ship struck a sandbar in the bay and was slowly broken apart by the surf, but everyone on board, all 276 of us, made it safely to shore. God had done exactly what Paul had said he would do.

We spent the next three months on Malta, and during that time I was able to learn more about Jesus from Paul: How Jesus taught people, healed people, and even how he calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee. But most importantly I learned more about Jesus death and resurrection, and what that means for my life. It means my sins are all paid for, and so are yours. The selfish, self-centered lives we so often lead have been washed clean and made new in the blood of Jesus' selfless sacrifice on the cross. And not only did Jesus die to pay for all our sins, he also came back from the dead to let us know we are also going to rise from our graves. We will rise to live with him in a place of perfect peace and joy and happiness.

The more I learned about Jesus, the more I wanted to share Jesus. I don't ever want people to feel as lost and helpless and hopeless as I did. I want others to know about the powerful Savior they have. Jesus is your Savior too. Like me, Jesus found you when you were lost, lost within the sea of your sinful self. Like me, Jesus has forgiven all your sins, and has given you the hope of eternal life. Share your Savior with everyone that you know. Share with others the hope that you have in the One who can save people from any storm that life can throw at them. Amen.