



St. Luke's East Hampton Reflections from Fr. Ben

Sept. 18, 2025

From the Rector

After church last Sunday, I flew out to meet a Coast Guard cutter that had requested chaplain support. Because of flight delays, I arrived at the ship at about 1:30 on Monday morning. I slept a few hours, then got up to be introduced and address the crew before they got underway. Not long after we left port, the waves and wind picked up and by the middle of the night we were working through 15-20 foot waves and 40+ knot winds, which left everyone exhausted and many not feeling very well.

The next day we came into calmer seas and the captain of the cutter asked me to lead vespers for the crew at sunset. For security reasons, I don't have access to the ship's computers, the internet, a copier or even a thumb drive of past services. All I had was my Prayerbook, a Bible and the vast resources of our Anglican and Episcopal heritage. I began the service with a few of the opening sentences of Evening Prayer, continued with "The Phos Hilaron," (BCP p. 112) an ancient Greek Prayer used at the setting of the sun, added the Lord's prayer and other prayers for the evening, including one of my favorites from Compline, "Keep watch dear Lord with those who work or watch or weep this night and give thine angels charge over those who sleep." (BCP p. 134) I had the participants read Psalm 107: 23-31 (which describes men struggling to walk as their ships went through storms) and I read Mark 4:45-51 (Jesus calming the waves), and spoke about how God was with us and had brought us through not just the storm last night but the rough places they had been through over the last few months and in each case had brought us to a new and better place.

As the sun went down, and flying fish skipped above the waves and dolphins flashed in the water, a peaceful silence filled the air. We stood together on that gently rocking helicopter deck, not knowing exactly what would come next, but knowing that God was right there with us, that they were indeed in a new place, that things would be OK, and they were ready for their new mission to begin.

Later that night, on a ship's bridge so dark that you can't see the face of a person standing right next to you, a man who had come to that service started talking, shared his story, and bared his soul. While he was talking to me, his words filled that space and God's spirit of hope and healing came to everyone who was there. As I left the bridge, I looked up, saw the Milky Way and a thousand other stars and realized again the awesomeness of God.

Sometimes, when faced with the storms of life, we forget the depths of the resources at our fingertips, the richness of our traditions, and the power of prayers that have been passed on from generation to generation to change people's lives. One of the men said, "Wow. Those prayers and readings fit so well." That's the gift of our Episcopal liturgy. That's what I experienced on my short time away. That is what I hope you experience every week, right here at home.