

July 30, 2017
Summer Sermon Series
“Beaches of the Bible: Shipwreck Beach”



First Reading ~ Acts 27: 21-29, 33-44; 28:1-2

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 — the ship itself is doomed.

“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 has been told to 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.

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! With the meal finished and everyone full, the ship was further lightened by dumping the grain overboard.

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 the beach safely.

Once everyone was accounted for and we realized we had all made it, we learned that we were on the island of Malta. The people there went out of their way to be friendly to us. The day was rainy and cold and we were already soaked to the bone, but they built a huge bonfire and gathered us around it.

Second Reading ~ *Adapted from Linda Evans Shepherd in
"When You Don't Know What To Pray: How To Talk To God About Anything"*

There are times we can't hear God's voice or feel God's presence. That's when we have to continue our relationship with God on faith. Dictionary.com defines faith as, "Belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence." For as Paul said, "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

This may not be the best news for those of us who wish God would hand over an entire map of our future with footnotes to clearly explain our current crisis. But perhaps the real point is we need to develop such a deep relationship with God that we can completely trust God with our problems as well as with our future. We need to find that place where, like Job, a Godly person who suffered many heartaches and tragedies, we can say, "Though God slay me, yet will I hope in God" (Job 13:15). And that's our goal: to trust God with our current circumstances, as well as our life's journeys, because we know all things work for the good of those who love God and who are called to God's service (Rom. 8:28).