

THE MESSAGE

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Acts 27:13-38

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Adventure

Storms happen! Storms are a part of life. A storm can happen at anytime, anywhere to anyone. Lately we've seen some pretty vicious storms.

When the storm clouds start blowing from the west with a rumble of thunder I find myself turning on the TV to the weather channel or clicking on my computer at weather.gov to get the scoop on the storm. You know I never ask, *why is there a storm coming?* Instead I ask, *what do I need to do to get ready for the approaching storm?*

I've never lived through a category 3 or 4 or 5 hurricane. Hope I never do! And I've never witnessed a tornado first hand. Hope I never do! But I have encountered a few nasty storms in my lifetime. We all have. On a deeper, personal, symbolic level we've all encountered nasty storms of various kinds and we live to tell about them: relational storms, emotional storms, financial storms, spiritual storms.

We've all been pelted in one way or another by the winds of adversity and nearly drowned in the rising tides of hardship. We know what it feels like to barely survive, and we know that it's only by God's grace that we made it through the storms of life.

So let's talk about making it through the storms of life using Paul as our example. Paul is a guy who knows all about storms. When Paul describes his ministry to the Corinthians, he lays out some of the storms he has experienced (2 Corinthians 11):

"I've been imprisoned frequently, been flogged, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked."

Talk about a stormy life!

In today's reading from Acts, we hear Luke's account of a vicious storm that he and Paul survive on the Mediterranean Sea. Paul has few things to teach us about navigating the storms of life; not just surviving, but thriving through them. Paul offers us three life-lessons.

First life-lesson is this: in every storm, Paul asks, “what is God up to?”

Most of us, when we’re in a storm, ask questions like “*when will it be over?*” or “*how do I escape it?*” Not Paul, he asks, “what is God up to here?”

Paul has this unshakable faith that God is present and active in every part of his life, even in the midst of the storm. No matter how difficult his circumstances, no matter how violent the storm, Paul believes that God is always up to something, even (and especially) when the clouds are so thick that he can’t even see God. Paul trusts that God is up to something in the midst of the storms.

Second life-lesson is this: in every storm, Paul listens for God’s guidance and follows it.

Rather than deciding what should be done, Paul listens in prayer for guidance from the Holy Spirit. Paul doesn’t always get it right. Sometimes he thinks he is supposed to go in one direction, but the Spirit leads him in a different direction. Paul isn’t a self-led man. He allows the Holy Spirit to guide him.

He listens for that guidance in every situation, especially in the midst of the storms of life. Wherever the Spirit calls Paul to go, he goes. He is obedient even when God’s direction doesn’t seem to make logical sense, or when the journey seems dangerous. Above the wind and the waves of adversity, the Spirit speaks. Like Paul, we need to listen and obey.

Third life-lesson is this: in every storm, Paul trusts that where God guides, God provides.

Paul somehow knows that the storm he is sailing into will be vicious, but he goes anyway. God tells him to go, and God tells him that it will be alright, and so Paul goes.

When the ship is falling apart, when the crew and passengers are taking desperate measures, Paul calmly speaks peace into the people’s fear-filled hearts. While everyone around him looks for a way to escape or just survive, Paul sees an opportunity to point others to the One who created the wind and the waves – God, the almighty.

No matter what storm we’re facing, Paul teaches us to ask, “what is God up to?” then to listen for God’s guidance and follow it, and then trust that where God guides, God provides.

This is great advice for people like you and me who find ourselves battling the winds and the waves of adversity in our daily lives. Storms happen. They are part of life.

Here's the thing, we don't get to decide when the storms come, but we do get to decide how we will respond. Paul teaches us to respond with faith. You may be in a storm right now -- or heading out of a storm right now -- or heading into a storm right now.

Storms happen and yet, no matter how wild the winds and how wicked the waves, keep this in mind: God is just as active in your life on stormy days as he is when it's 72 and sunny. We can trust God to guide us and lead us everyday. We can trust that wherever God guides, God provides.

Here is what I've learned. Sometimes God calms the storm, but sometimes God sets the sail of our lives to catch those winds and take us to places we never imagined, places that bless us and others in remarkable ways. So be it for Jesus' sake. Amen