

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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.” **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Friends,

Considering what is happening on the east coast with hurricane Florence, our lesson today about a storm certainly seems appropriate. Storms can be frightening. Little kids are often frightened by the noise and the darkness that can come with a storm. The people on the east coast right now are somewhat frightened wondering how much damage the storm is going to do to their homes and the places where they work. Will the winds wipe out their house and will the rain fill it with water. Will there be anything to return too?

Today’s sermon text is about a great storm and the people caught in this storm were frightened. They were unsure about how things were going to end up but at the time it did not seem good. It sort of reminds us about life in general because, at times, we experience unexpected storms in our lives too. Sometimes in the form of weather and sometimes coming in other ways. So what do we do? Like the sailors we often apply logic to our situation but that’s not always the answer. As we consider this portion of scripture we will see that the Apostle Paul encourages us to look to God and to let God’s providence bring us relief.

I. Paul was on a grain ship headed for Rome but because of the lateness of the season and the difficulties they were already encountering the ship was going to winter at one of the ports on the island of Crete. The first port they came to was called Fair Havens but the captain of the ship thought Phoenix, about 50 miles west of Fair Havens, would be a better port to winter in and so when the wind changed to a more favorable direction, they decided to take a chance and sail for Phoenix expecting to get there in 4-5 hours.

Human logic is not perfect and when the captain of the ship made his decision to sail, I'm sure there were other factors affecting his decision including some hope that his false gods might protect them or that they might even have some good luck.

Needless to say, the captain's decision was flawed and a sudden, violent storm came swooping down on them before they could react. They tried to get some control over the ship but were unsuccessful and had to hold on as the wind and sea swept them along. They got a little relief when they were driven past the island of Cauda – just enough time to pull the single lifeboat aboard and wrap some special lines around the hull of the ship to keep it from breaking apart. They also lowered a sea anchor to try and slow their progress and maintain a little control.

But the storm didn't relent and they feared they might become swamped and sink, so they threw some of the cargo overboard and the next day when things weren't any better they threw spare parts for the ship and tools overboard to lighten the load. Every step they took to survive was logical and something they had learned through many years on the sea and yet their human logic and skills were not enough. The storm seemed to have won.

They didn't know where they were because they hadn't seen the sun and stars in days. Some theologians estimate they endured this storm for 10-15 days. They had plenty of food but hadn't been eating because the storm was so intense they were either seasick or just didn't have an appetite. Their situation seemed hopeless and since they didn't believe in God, once they tried everything they could think off, they were in despair – ready to give up and die.

We often get into situations like these sailors – unexpected storms come into our lives in many different ways. Our first inclination is to apply our skills and knowledge and to try and solve the problem. There's nothing wrong with that and many times we can make some headway or even resolve our problems completely. But what about those times when one thing after another disrupts our lives and no matter what we do, wave after wave of trouble threatens to swamp our boat?

It would be very easy to despair and give up like the sailors – thinking we have done everything possible – and a lot of people do just that. But we aren't like everyone else – our psalm today reminds us that, **“God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble.”** (Psalm 46:1). Our Old Testament lesson emphasizes that, **“Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.”** (Proverbs 30:5). God promises, **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”** (Hebrews 13:5). **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”** (Romans 8:28). We aren't like everyone because we have the promises of God and we trust the promises of God because he kept his greatest promise to send his Son into this world to rescue us from the ocean of our sins.

Just think about all that Jesus endured for us – the mocking and constant verbal attacks from the Pharisees; the beatings and whipping; the mental anguish as everyone abandoned him on the cross including his own Father as he paid for our sins, and finally death. Our Savior did all that all that so that our sins wouldn't drown us in death – physical and spiritual death. It defies human

logic and yet this is God's plan – according to God's logic that he supplies salvation to us as a free gift – a gift from the Holy Spirit.

II. There were 275 people on the ship along with Paul. What do you think they were all doing during these stormy days? I'm sure they lent a hand wherever it was needed, but I also think Paul probably spent some time praying for himself as well as all the others on this ship. And after the sailors had done all the logical things to try and survive this storm, God gave Paul a glimpse of his logic and an indication of how things would turn out.

“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.” Doesn't it sound like Paul was telling them, “I told you so.” At face value it may seem like he was bragging but Paul said this to show them he spoke the truth in the past and he was speaking the truth again. Paul hoped his comment would encourage them to listen.

“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.’” This is good news. They would live because God wanted Paul to survive and would save those that were with him as well. But it was bad news for the ship owners – the boat would not survive the storm, but boats can be replaced.

Paul told the people they could believe this because it came from God who owns Paul and whom Paul serves. We can say God owns Paul as well as each one of us because Jesus redeemed us or bought us back from the devil with his holy precious blood. We are his and because we are his, we want to serve him just as Paul did. That is a natural desire that comes from a heart of faith. Paul ends this portion of scripture with words of encouragement and a warning to be prepared for the loss of the ship because they will soon run aground.

This story of Paul fits so well with the gospel for today. Like the disciples, our faith has its low points when we don't trust God but we want to remember that we belong to him. He has redeemed us who were lost and condemned by our sins and He holds our heads above the troubled waters of life – he is our life preserver and so you want to, **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”** (Proverbs 3:5). God will carry you through the unexpected storms in your lives – not because of your flawed human logic but through his perfect logic that comes to us through his Word. As you deal with your difficulties, and there will always be difficulties, don't do it alone. Take your troubles to God in prayer and trust that he will deliver you. And you will not be disappointed. Amen.