

Text: Acts 27. 27-44
St Stephen's

July 12/13, 2008
Sat/Sun

The Lord of the Storms

I want to introduce you to someone...



Our first grandchild, Ian Whitman Chapman weighed in on Tuesday at 6.3 lbs/oz. We drove up and spent 4 hours with Tim and Liz and got back the same evening. Here's a mug shot of the little fella.



We could have picked him out of a nursery of 40 newborns: a dead ringer for his dad, Tim. Becca kept saying, 'he's perfect, he's perfect.' So this is the second perfect human being born in the history of the world. Here are his Mom and Dad... Tim and Liz.



They made it home the next day safely. But I was worried about how their 2 year old corgi named Pippin would do with Ian – because Pippin rules this household. Well, not to worry; Pippin immediately adopted Ian!



We had a long discussion on what we should be called. Bec settled for 'Nina' (a welsh word for Grandma) and I settled for 'Gramps' – which led our in-laws to immediately label us 'Moma-Nina' and 'Grumps'!!!

We're moving to Washington DC next week! Ok, enough family photos...

We are getting near the end of Acts, and today we are looking at the 27th chapter. You remember **Paul is under arrest**, has spent years in jail in Caesarea, has **appealed** to Caesar and is now **on his way to Rome** to stand trial before Caesar.

Aaron gave you some of the details a couple of weeks ago – their ship has been caught in **an early winter storm** and driven across the Aegean sea for a couple of weeks. They've made every effort to save themselves, **lashing** the ship together, **lightening** their load, **bracing** their rigging – until, in Luke's memorable phrase,

When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

Acts 27:20

It is **a stunning turn of events**. "*we gave up all hope.*" On board that ship is **the premier mission team** of Jesus, including two of the primary authors of the New Testament. There are all the passengers –

276 of them together. They have done every possible human thing to save themselves, and the storm will not let up. And *they gave up all hope.*

This is **an episode that mirrors moments in our lives** as well – the ‘**I give up**’ kind of crises that do seem to come. You’ve **lashed** the boat together, you’ve **lightened** the load, you’ve **braced** the rigging – but a storm is upon you and it will not relent. And you get to that place where all hope is lost.

What Aaron said to you a couple weeks ago was **two simple and important words:**

1. God is there in the storm... He actually is ‘the Lord of the storm’
2. When you are caught in a storm like that, if you stay close to the Lord of the storm, you wash ashore in a new place.

How do you stay close to the Lord of the Storm in the storm?

Three thoughts...

In The Storm, Listen For God’s Voice...

There are **a lot of voices in the storm**. On this ship was the **owner** of the ship and **the centurion with his soldiers** and **the prisoners**– who were all weighing in. And think of **the sailors** on board that ship. And there was also this **mission team** – Paul and Luke and their friends. They are urgent and desperate and frightened. There are always **lots of voices in the storm**. It is hard to sort them out.

Finally there was **another voice**. One they could have listened to before they set sail, but they didn’t. But now they are in the place where ‘*we gave up all hope.*’

And Paul speaks up again...

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...

Acts 27:22-23

Isn't it true that **when you give up on yourself, you find God**? One saint said, 'God always has **the same address** – at the end of your rope.' He'll **meet you earlier**, if you have ears to hear. And he'll **meet you there** if that is what it takes. Sometimes, 'all hope is lost' storms is **what it takes** to clear our ears out.

And then when he speaks, it is almost always a wonderful word of **encouragement...** *'Do not be afraid... not one of you will be lost...'* and you know it is **the voice of the Lord of the storm.**

In The Storm, Look For God's Gifts...

"All hope is gone" **storms are places of destruction.** They strip you of everything that you value in life, slowly and surely, it is all taken away. It is what happened to **Job**. It is what happened to **Jesus**. It is what happened to **Paul**. You think, 'It is all over...'

But then, something remarkable happens. You think **everything is gone** – but just then **real gifts are given**, or discovered, sometimes for the first time.

So the angel said to Paul...

'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.'

Acts 27:23-24

The storm sorts it all out. The stuff that doesn't matter is stripped away, and the **things that do matter are given and treasured and precious.** The storm sorts it all out.

Tony Snow died yesterday... Fox News commentator, White House Press Sect'y, 53 years old, a husband and Dad with 3 young kids. A follower of Jesus with deep and evident faith and character. **He perished in a storm called colon cancer.** A year or two ago he wrote about his

storm...

"Blessings arrive in unexpected packages—in my case, cancer.

*Why me?... I don't know why I have cancer, and I don't much care. It is what it is—a plain and indisputable fact. Yet even while staring into a mirror darkly, great and stunning truths begin to take shape. Our maladies define a central feature of our existence: **We are fallen. We are imperfect.** Our bodies give out...*

(you learn that in the storm)

But despite this—because of it—God offers ...grace...

*[What helped me was to...] remember that we were born not into death, but into life—and that the journey continues after we have finished our days on this earth. We accept this on faith, but that faith is nourished by a conviction that stirs even within many nonbelieving hearts—an intuition that the gift of life, once given, [will not] be taken away. Those who have been stricken enjoy the special privilege of **being able to live**—fully, richly, exuberantly—no matter how their days may be numbered.*

[And], we can open our eyes and hearts [to] God...

*We want lives of simple, predictable ease—smooth, even trails as far as the eye can see—but **God likes to go off-road.** He provokes us with twists and turns. He places us in predicaments that seem to defy our endurance and comprehension—and yet don't. By his love and grace, we persevere. The challenges that make our hearts leap and stomachs churn invariably strengthen our faith and grant measures of wisdom and joy we would not experience otherwise.*

God often gives his best gifts in the storm.

How do you find the Lord in the storm?

In The Storm, Stay Close To God's People...

They were approaching an island, driven towards a certain wreck...

In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat

down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow.

The **sailors** – that is the crew of the ship - were going to make a run for it, and leave everyone else to their fate. So Paul steps in and says to the **soldiers**...

"Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved."
Acts 27:30-31

The **soldiers** listen to Paul this time, and pull the sailors back on the ship and cut away the life boat.

Did you pick up the sentence here... *"Unless **these men** stay with the ship, **you** cannot be saved."* **They** are essential to **your** safety, Paul said. **You** are essential to **their** safety.

They didn't think so – or didn't care. But Paul saw it – **everyone is essential** to getting through this storm. **God has put you together, so stay together.** You won't make it without them. They won't make it without you.

We are **in a storm in our denomination.** We've **lashed** the boat together, we've **lightened** the load, we've **braced** the rigging – but a storm is upon us and it will not relent. We can see the wreck coming, driven by the unrelenting winds of a false and shallow gospel. God is **taking us off road** to deal with something important.

Some of us at St Stephens have wanted to jump into the lifeboat and launch out on the waves. **"Let's go it alone!"** has been the cry. But the **Lord of the storm has spoken:**

- **"Stay together"** with believers in your diocese.
- In **Jerusalem** he spoke again: **"Stay together"** with believers in the global south.
- Inside our **parish** he speaks again: **"Stay together.** I brought you here for this reason. You won't make it without them. They won't make it without you."

Don't put one foot out into that lifeboat! He wants all hands on deck.

Stay together!! That is **a word from the Lord of the storm!**

The storm changed the lives of all 276 on board that ship. Sailors and soldiers, prisoners and missionaries... Everyone of them **met the Lord** of the storm. Everyone of them **heard the word of God**. Everyone of them **saw mercy upon mercy**. Everyone of them **found out what mattered** – and what didn't. Everyone of them **reached land safely, washed up in a new place**.

It is the hand of the Lord of the Storm.