



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

July 5, 2009

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Acts 27:13-26

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Proverbs 30:4,5

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 46

Second Lesson: Acts 27:13-26

Gospel: Mark 4:35-41

### **Hold On to the Anchor of God's Promises**

Trust them

Share them

If I were to ask you this morning, what are some things in this world that you don't understand, I could tell you what some of the answers are going to be right away. The men sitting here are going to say, "I don't understand women." The women sitting here are going to say, "I don't understand men." The children here are going to say, "I don't understand parents." The parents sitting here are going to say, "I don't understand children, let alone teenagers." The employers here are going to say, "I don't understand my employees." And the employees are going to say, "I don't get my boss. I don't know what in the dickens he is trying to do or what he is trying to tell me."

Am I right? Are those some of the things you would have thought?

Think about that for a moment. These are the people we rub shoulders with every day, right? And we can't understand each other. Is that a fair statement? There are a lot of things about each other we just can't understand and we just don't get. How many times in a week do you find yourself shaking your head at someone and thinking, "What in the world were they thinking?"

So it's kind of a little bit, oh I don't know, the height of arrogance if we think we should be able to understand God and we should be able to question why God would do some of the things he does or allow some of the things to happen that he lets happen. And yet as Christians, that's kind of how we are at times, aren't we? Our sinful nature wants to say, "Why God? Why would you let this happen to this person? Why would you let this happen to me? Why can't things go a little more smoothly God? I've always tried to serve you God. Why do I have to face such a challenge in this relationship or in that checking account or in that part of my work life?"

You and I face a lot of things that at times are going to lead us to say, "Lord, don't you care if we drown," like the disciples did. We are going to be asking him, "Lord, why are you letting this happen" when in reality what we are asking is "What are you thinking God or are you even thinking God or are you even paying attention God?"

It's because of that it's such a blessing today to get together and focus on all of the readings that we had this morning and see these truths that God puts in front of us that

are undeniable and that are the rock-solid foundation of who we are as Christians and our faith and trust in God. But boy, you and I need to go back to them often, because we need to be reminded often to hold on tight to the promises God has given us. There are a lot of things in this world that just distract us and take our attention off of God's promises.

Look at the promise that we sang in the song today, "God is our refuge and strength, even though the mountains fall into the sea and the waters quake with their surging." Then we had a couple of readings that got the waters quake with the surging, right? Do you think Paul might have had Psalm 46 go through his head as he spends night after night in the middle of a hurricane on that boat? Do you think he might have thought of some of those promises of God as well? I don't know that, but it wouldn't surprise me a bit.

I think this is a fascinating reading to think about and to put yourself into the positions of the people on this boat. They are sailing. They are leaving Crete, and Paul had told them not to leave because it was too late in the season. They thought they could still make it. They were about to go ahead, and God had told them there were going to be problems. I read you those two paragraphs. It didn't take me that long to read it. But when Paul stands up to address the sailors on that boat, the people on that boat, how long do you think it took him to say that as the ship was being battered by those waves, as it was being tossed back and forth, after they had dropped the sea anchor so they could hopefully not be knocked onto the sandbars of Sytris. They were being bounced along as every wave maybe lifted up that sea anchor a little bit and dropped it back down. The waves were crashing against the boat and there's Paul, giving them this address, trying to encourage them and point them to the promises of God, the place where he was finding his comfort.

I have to believe it was a little bit tougher for them to hear Paul than it is for you to hear me. I have to believe it was a little tougher than a few children crying in the back of church to be able to hear what Paul was saying when you are in the middle of a boat like that, right? Yet here is Paul, making the effort, taking the time because it was so vital that those promises got out to those sailors and so vital that those promises were shared by Paul because the promises of God were the anchor that would hold them fast through this storm and anything else in their lives.

He told them God had sent an angel to him the night before and had told him that they would not die. The ship would, but they wouldn't. They were going to have to run aground, and the ship would be destroyed. They would live however. That was God's promise to them. He said, "God has told me I have to go testify about who Jesus is before Caesar."

Now that's a pretty precious promise when you are in the middle of a storm, and it's something great to hang on to, but can you imagine the questions that would flood through Paul's mind? "Okay Lord, you want me to testify before Caesar, but why do you have to toss my stomach all over this sea before I get there? Why do I have to go

through all of this?” Think about it. He is saying, “It won’t be too long and we are going to be bobbing in the water, but we’ll all get to shore.” Do you think a part of the sinful nature of Paul would be saying, “Lord, why do I have to bob in the water? Why can’t you just make the storm stop? It’s not like you haven’t done it before. Make it stop. Make it a little easier. Why does it have to be so hard?”

God doesn’t answer that question for Paul though, does he? He doesn’t say, “Here’s why I’m doing this, Paul. Here is the blessing that is going to come for you after you go through all of this.” No, he just says, “Here’s my promise. Hang on to it tight.”

So that’s what Paul does. He hangs on to it tight. He doesn’t hold his breath and say, “No, I’m not going to do that until you tell me the ‘why’ God.” He says, “I’m going to trust you. I’m going to believe you.” That’s the nature of faith – putting your trust in what you can’t see. Can you see a purpose for bobbing in the water and going through this storm that goes on and on and on, so much so that they are putting ropes underneath the ship just to try to hold it together. They are throwing the tackle over the ship. They’ve already gotten rid of the cargo. There is no answer for the “why” of any of that. There is just the promise of God that “I will be with you through it all, and I will bring you safely out of it.”

Think of what this means for your life and for my life. It really is reminding you and me that we need to tell our sinful nature at times just to shut up. God isn’t going to answer all of our questions on the “why” God would let this happen. He’s never promised to. If he does, that’s a wonderful blessing from his hand. But all these questions about why are really some of Satan’s way to try to drive a wedge between us and our God, to get us to doubt God’s love or God’s good intentions for us, to doubt God’s promise that all things will work out for our good, because Satan will say, “How can this be good when you are facing this heartache, this pain, this disaster, this terrible thing in your life that you are going to go through?” We are going to face them. We live in a sinful world. It’s just the nature of things.

But this is the nature of our God. The nature of our God is not to let us rot in our sins which you and I deserve to have happen. We don’t deserve any promise from God that he will deliver us, that he will take away even our sins. The only way we can claim that promise is that he made it to us first. He came to us when we were dead in our transgressions and sins and made us alive with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For many of us, that might have happened at that very font right there where in the waters of baptism he washed away our sins and gave us the gift of faith. Or it might have happened as we heard the Word and the Spirit changed our hearts and led us to believe that even though we deserve an eternity in hell, Jesus lived in our place and died in our place and took away our sins. And that is the depth of our God’s love for us.

So Paul can say, when he writes to the Romans, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also gladly give us all good things?” Not all enjoyable things. Not all things that we are happy and giddy about, but they are going to be for our eternal good. That’s his promise.

He is our refuge and our strength. That's his promise. And when we can't understand a lot of things that we face, go back to what we can understand. You can understand that God loved you so much that he sent his one and only Son into the world to take away your sins, to be perfect where you haven't been perfect. You know that. The Spirit has led you to believe that. Now keep coming back to that and then hold on to the other promises God has given you like you are a drowning man in the sea hanging on to a life preserver because this is the certainty that makes all of these other promises "yes, Jesus took away our sins."

So don't get mad at God because you can't understand him. You and I are sinners. You can't expect to understand a Holy God perfectly. But you can rejoice that he has made these promises to you that he will be with you and that he'll keep you through all the things that we go through in this lifetime until he takes you to heaven.

I sat and visited a man in a hospital room who expressed these truths to me beautifully. I was sitting there listening to him and he said to me, "I don't know how people who don't have Jesus in their life can face things like this," this disease that is causing him all kinds of problems. He says, "I know that I am dying. I'm a dying man, but then again, aren't we all. The blessing is that I know it and I know where I'm going, and I'm not afraid to have the Lord call me out of this world because I know he is taking me to heaven." What a beautiful statement of hanging on to the anchor of God's promises. There's really nothing left for me as a pastor to say after he says those beautiful confessions of faith. An example of holding on to that promise and the difference it makes for us.

But here is the beautiful thing. When he speaks like that to me and he shares that promise even with his pastor, it encourages me. It strengthens me. As we share these promises with each other, with those who already believe, we comfort and encourage each other as we face the things that are here because we live in a sinful world.

And here's the other truth that God has put us here in this world for. You and I rub shoulders with all kinds of people during the week who are going to hell because they don't know this promise. They don't know that God has taken away their sins in Jesus, or else they've heard it and they've put it so far back in the line of the priorities in their lives that it's gone. They take our money every morning when we buy our morning coffee. They sit next to us at soccer games or softball games or baseball games. They work in the cubicle next to us, or they are the people that report to us. We see them every day. God has given you and me the anchor of his promise so that we will trust in him, but also so that we share it, with those who believe, and with those who don't believe, so that all of us can have something bigger than us, better than us, stronger than us to get us through the incredibly difficult times that come as you live in a sinful world.

It's kind of amazing that God entrusts people like you and me, people that often have worries and anxieties and doubts, that he entrusts us with the privilege of being his mouthpiece. That's what he does.

So grow in your knowledge of the promises, go with the knowledge of God's promises, and share them and hang on to them tight.