

SERMON ~ BIBLE READING: ACTS 27:1, 13-44; ACTS 28:11-15, 28 -31

FAITH AT WORK

I had been visiting a young guy out at Ballochmyle Hospital in Ayrshire – he was very much in my prayers and thoughts – my prayers seemed answered when I heard that surgery had been successful and he was recovering well – then everything went wrong and he died – I can tell you, my faith wasn't only challenged but shaken and I wondered what God was playing at. I've been in that place many times since as I've got involved with people struggling with bereavement and illness, stress and distress. My faith – or rather the God in whom I put my faith – has always carried me through in the end and I've learned more about him. I know I'm not alone and I'm sure that all us will have gone through times when our faith has been challenged and we've wondered what God is up to. Paul himself must have felt this many times – indeed he seems to have gone through much tougher times than I've ever had to, times when he was under such great pressure, far beyond his ability to endure, that he despaired of life itself, but his faith always carried him through, for his faith was rooted in the God who raises the dead. In today's Bible passages we see that faith at work again.

'DON'T GO'

When it was decided to sail for Italy, it's hardly surprising that they took the advice of the pilot and the owner rather than Paul – after all, what did he know about sailing? But he did know that the timing was in God's hands and that when people are listening to God they can see things in a different way. So however frustrating the delay might have been, they should have listened to Paul and stayed in harbour.

During the refurbishment of the church building, we encountered many frustrations and delays. It was then that we learned about listening to what God was saying and then seeing things in a different way. It was then that we learned that the timing is in God's hands, not ours

'DON'T BE AFRAID'

Paul knew that nothing could stop God's plan that he proclaim the kingdom of God and teach about the Lord Jesus Christ in Rome. So he knew that the hurricane that was battering their ship couldn't stop God's plans. This assurance banished any fears he had.

Sometimes the emotional, mental or spiritual storms that can batter our lives blind to the fact that nothing can stop God's plans for our lives. We can only feel the storm and so we get scared. In such stormy times we sometimes haven't a clue what God is playing at, but today let us be assured that he will

bring us through and fulfil his plans for our lives. So don't be afraid.

'DON'T MAKE A RUN FOR IT'

Who can blame the sailors for attempting to escape from the storm battered ship that might be dashed against rocks at any moment by letting the lifeboat down into the sea. Their behaviour of the sailors was quite natural – we might well have done the same. But for Paul that didn't ensure the safety of all and that was what God had promised. In stormy times in our lives it's easy, almost natural, to panic and find our own solutions; to wait for God to act is often very hard. But it is what he calls us to do as we trust in him.

'DON'T GO HUNGRY'

If they were going to make the final dash for land, they needed to eat and build up their strength. As well as trusting in God, Paul had a practical side! Both are important. Let's make sure that we look after ourselves – our physical and mental health, as well as our spiritual well-being.

We end with Paul preaching in Rome. Paul had been patient and faithful. He had obeyed when it might have been easier not to. He had hung on when there did not seem to be any way forward. God's plan had been carried out. What an encouragement to us to be faithful and patient.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A survey was apparently conducted by a church in East London. To the question, 'Do you believe in God?' one respondent answered, 'Yes.' To the follow up, 'Do you believe in a God who can change the course of events on earth?' the answer was, 'No, just the ordinary one.'

GOING DEEPER

Questions on the Bible passages, Acts 27:1, 13-44; Acts 28:11-15, 28 -31, and on the sermon for you to think about, either on your own or in a small group:

1. What do you make of Paul's attitude throughout these verses? Why is it that he seems to be in control?
2. What does Paul's simple act of taking bread, giving thanks and eating suggest to us? What is the significance of doing this in front of 276 people, most of whom were not Christians? What does this say to us about an attitude of thankfulness and our behaviour?
3. How does God encourage Paul in these verses? What do we learn from that about the nature of encouragement and its place in Christian life?