

Non-Anxious Leadership

[Acts 27:1; Acts 27:13-20, 27:33-36](#)

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Sooner or later your family, your office, or our nation will be ravaged by a storm. The heroes who get us through the storms are not necessarily those who are in charge. Often they are ordinary people who are doing ordinary things unafraid.

From the time that literature began, we have always loved sailing stories like *The Odyssey*, *The Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, and *Moby Dick*. Contemporary author Patrick O'Brian has written more than twenty novels about sailing vessels. The Bible also offers several exciting stories on the sea: Noah who sailed on an ark, Jonah who sailed in a great fish, and the disciples who thought their little boat would sink in a great storm.

Come to think of it, every good sailing story has a storm in it. Otherwise, what's the point of telling the story? Surviving the storm is the point. That is why we love these stories. They serve as metaphors for surviving the storms as your own little boat ventures out into the volatile sea called Life.

So it is no surprise that Luke cannot finish telling the story of the Early Church in the book of Acts without describing the great storm that almost sank the ship in which he and Paul were sailing. By the time the church was able to read Luke's account of the Acts of the Apostles, it was already facing the great storm of persecution. Luke knew that. So he isn't interested in just telling us an exciting story. His interest, the interest of the Holy Spirit who inspired Luke's writing, is to tell the church how to survive when the storms hit.

Paul was being transferred from Caesarea to Rome where he would stand trial before Caesar. Apparently Luke was again traveling with him. Paul was still under arrest, guarded by a centurion who placed them all on board a ship. From the moment they began the journey, the wind was against them. By the time the ship got to Crete they had lost so much time that the winter storms were on their way. Paul suggested that they simply stay in Crete for the winter, but the captain and the owner of the ship, people with the expert opinions, insisted on sailing on. As soon as they left the harbor, the skies turned dark, the wind turned violent, and a great storm raged down on the boat threatening the lives of its 276 passengers.

With vivid details, Luke describes how the sailors lowered the anchors, threw the cargo and the tackle overboard, and pulled chains across the bottom of the boat to keep it from breaking apart. Still the tempest raged for fourteen days. As Luke says, "all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned."

In sailing stories, this is always the point where the heroes emerge at the point where all hope has been abandoned. It is when the doctor says, "There is nothing else we can do." Or when the boss says, "We can't keep the office open. There is no hope for keeping your job." Or when the polls say, "You're never going to make it." That is when the heroes appear. And who is the hero in this story? It's not the captain of the ship, nor is it the centurion. No, the hero is the man in chains who has been in prayer through the storm.

After Paul got everyone's attention on the ship, he can't help saying, "You should have listened to me back in Crete." (This one "I told you so," was just irresistible even to an apostle.) But then Paul tells everyone, "Keep up your courage. For last night there stood beside me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship. He told me, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor, and indeed God has granted safety to you, and all those who are sailing with you.' So keep up your courage men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told" (27:23-24).

Paul then goes on to say that the ship won't make it, but not one of them will lose a single hair on their heads. Then, just to illustrate his confidence, Paul starts to eat. And he encourages the others to have a bite as well. In fact, Paul goes ahead and says the blessing over the food, while the waves are still crashing over the boat! It was such a crazy thing to do, but the sailors went ahead and had a bite to eat as well. So there on board a ship that was destined for destruction, gathered around a common meal, Paul turned the sailor's despair into hope.

Now how did Paul do this? And how do we find this heroic faith that is able to get others through the dark storms of life?

The first and most important thing Paul did was nurture his vision of the future. When you are in the middle of a dark storm, you have to remember that you are only in the present tense. Tomorrow belongs to God, and he has made some wonderful promises about it. But notice Paul's faith, getting to that future is not in the sailors or in the captain. He is not going to encourage anyone by telling them to believe in themselves. The sailors have already done all they know to do. That was when they abandoned all hope of being saved. No, Paul says, "I have faith in God."

Anxiety and despair are very contagious. But so is faith in God. You are called to believe in God, not just for your sake, but for the sake of the others who are on board. There are people around you who need you to believe. They are going to be leaning on your faith, and are literally dying for you to find a vision or two. How will you find that vision? The same way Paul did in prayer. For it is in our prayers that the angels of God come to minister to us, renewing our faith.

Do not wait for the storms to hit before you start praying. Paul was the one who told us to pray without ceasing. Since he learned to pray in the ordinary times, when the seas were calm, he knew how to look for the angels when the storms hit. Everyone else was focused on the waves, the violent wind, and the rickety boat. But through his daily prayer, Paul had already learned to look for the

presence of God. When the storms come, it is too late to learn that. So you have to start the discipline of prayer today.

It is striking that as soon as Paul begins to speak about the visions he has received in prayer, he is immediately in charge of that ship. That is the power of a man or woman of vision. It has nothing to do with who is in a position of leadership, and everything to do with who is listening to God. For he is the only one in a position to lead the wind and the waves.

The second thing that heroes do in the midst of crisis is attend to ordinary things. Paul reminds everyone that they haven't eaten in two weeks. He almost has to take on the role of being the ship den-mother. "You need your strength, boys, if you're going to survive." But Paul isn't just worried about the need for a meal. More importantly, he is teaching them to do an ordinary act as an extraordinary act of faith in God. Nobody ever sits down to dinner on a ship in the middle of a dark storm! Unless they know, unless they are certain, that they are going to be just fine.

We live in a world that sometimes seems like it is coming apart at the seams. There is violence in the streets, diseases that are visiting all our homes, and the storms of addiction and heartache that are tearing apart our families. Nevertheless, we who believe and talk to God insist upon having children and teaching them virtues, going to work and buying homes, and sharing a meal or two. And we do it all as a great declaration of faith not in ourselves, or in the market, or in human potential, but "faith in the God to whom we belong and whom we worship."

From the perspective of heaven, the hero is not necessarily the person we celebrate with great parades, but the person who faithfully maintains commitments and responsibilities. Not because they are stuck, but because they are called to the most heroic challenge of all daily faithfulness in the ordinary places.

The third thing that heroes do in the midst of a storm is to give thanks to God . . . before the storm is over. Before daybreak, before there were any signs of this storm letting up, Luke tells us that Paul, "took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat." It is the same language Luke used in his gospel when he described the sacrament of the Eucharist. The word Eucharist means thanksgiving. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are giving thanks for the grace we have received.

The mark of a true hero is that he or she knows how to give thanks before the storm is over. Jesus instituted the practice of eucharistic communion before the cross. To follow him is to learn to give thanks for a deliverance that is still on the way. That is why our gratitude is the measure of our spirituality.

According to our text today, everyone on board the ship made it to safety by the grace of God. So, your deliverance is not dependent on your gratitude. Your deliverance is dependent on God. Gratitude simply allows you to enjoy the adventure along the way.

Merciful God, we give to you our anxious hearts, asking that you will transform them into grateful hearts that are filled with faith in you who walks beside us through the storms into daybreak. Amen.