

Province VIII Workshop
“Reaching out to Serve” a.k.a., “Rowing the Boat”
Closing Sermon (as delivered or spoken)
On 5/25/23
By The Rev. Heather Dee Rose

Based on scriptures: Acts 22:30, 23:6-11; John 17:20-26

Today in Acts, we see the Apostle Paul, a leader, who after having been caught up into the third heaven and shown the Truth and God’s plans for us, was commissioned by Jesus to be His witness. And just before the section we read from Acts today, the events that led up to today are that Paul has just suffered greatly for having stood up in Jerusalem in order to carry out his commission to witness by spreading the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus, (2 Corinthians 4:7). As a result of the Apostle Paul spreading this Good News in Jerusalem, the religious leaders and the crowd become so stirred up that they had just tried to kill Paul. In fact, right before our reading for today we are told that the crowd is so violent that the Roman Soldiers come to break up the commotion, because the crowd is physically beating on Paul so badly that they are killing him. And the crowd remains so violent that the Roman Guards have to carry Paul to physically protect him enough to prevent this killing. And I say to you, it was not merely the guards protecting Paul. It was Jesus Christ himself. Working through the guards. And the guards take Paul to their barracks.

And so, think on this: Paul is lying in the barracks. Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, has just been beaten so severely he was almost murdered, and he is lying in the barracks ... probably not feeling really great, you know. I mean, he is certainly bruised and bleeding and wincing and maybe even wondering if there were not some other form of ministry that he could possibly get involved with. And it is probably hard for Paul to get comfortable on the cot. And maybe he was lying on the hard floor, we don’t know. And we are told in scripture that Jesus comes to him. And Jesus stands by him the very next night after the beating. Jesus comes and speaks to Paul. And of this account we are told today in scripture, and I quote: “The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said...”

And said what? Did the Lord say, “Oh Paul, I’m so sorry you are going through all of this. Surely you must really be hurting. You did such a good job for me in Jerusalem, take some time off. Go and take a rest, Paul.”

No. What happens is the following night while Paul is still writhing in agony, Jesus shows up and says to Paul, “Take courage!” Take courage because I have more for you to do in spreading the Good News. “As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

And I can only imagine Paul’s response, because I believe Paul knows Jesus enough to see the humor in that. I imagine Paul saying, “Gee, thanks Lord.”

Because I don't know if any of you can relate to having aches and pains or commotion going on in your life whereby it would be nice to get a little bit of sympathy now and again, but this isn't exactly what Paul receives when Jesus appears and stands next to him in the Barracks. I mean I have no doubt that Jesus appeared to strengthen Paul, but Jesus does not say, "My poor little Punim Paul." No. Jesus says (and I am paraphrasing), "What you just did for me, and all that you just went through, now I want you to do it again in Rome. On an even larger scale."

And Paul responds, "I'll do it." And we know that Paul responds with, "I'll do it," because next we see in Acts that Paul in fact goes and does just this. And so those exact words may not be in our scripture reading for today, but the very action is spelled out if we were to continue to read from Acts. Paul goes and does exactly what the Lord would have him do.

You were called here to this workshop to say, "I'll do it." I will take courage and I will row this boat for Jesus because as Daughters, we have been commissioned by Jesus Christ to not only teach the Good News in our smaller towns, but also unto nations (Matt 28:19). And Daughters have the network to do this. We are in 21 nations. And so, the immediate towns are important, and the nations throughout the world are also important. And so, we are to keep rowing. We are to keep rowing despite the fact that our arms get tired, and we hit storms and high waves, and we become fearful like the disciples who during one storm forgot for a moment that there isn't anything we need to be fearful of on the boat because our Lord can command a storm to stop at a moment's notice. We serve the All-Powerful Creator of the universe, and so this is why Jesus said to his disciples during the storm on the boat: "You of little faith, why are you so afraid? Take Courage!"

And so, this is a good segue for some additional analogies about this boat that we are rowing as God's Daughters: When we began on Tuesday night, during the Evening Service, we talked about how boats keep us safe. Just like the ark and also little baby Noah's basket – the tarred contraption that Miriam, his sister, helped to make to keep her baby brother safe. When we help pull others onto the boat called, Jesus Christ, we save them. We also saw this occurring in our discussions about the caring relationship between Naomi and Ruth—the older generation with the younger generation. We relate to this relationship because this is what we are supposed to do as Daughters. We are especially committed to caring for women and the next generation of young girls. And we also saw the saving of an entire race of people. Esther was used by God to save an entire nation by becoming vulnerable enough to step out of the boat and speak up. And so, God can work through us to speak up and even save nations. But also, we saw, that by Mary taking courage and saying, "I'll do it," God worked to save the world. This to me seems to be no small thing. This saying of "yes" to God and being used to save others.

And we can see that boats are also used to get each other where we need to go. First Ruth helps Naomi to get where she needs to be and then Naomi helps Ruth. Likewise, this is who we are as Daughters when we row the boat. We see the talents God has given to our sisters around us and we become "pesky" by urging and encouraging them to following their callings so that we build one another up. And last but not least, we saw the woman by the well evangelizing.

She goes back to her community and has the courage to tell a bunch of Samaritans about a Jew whom she believes to be God. That type of announcement had the potential to go over like the Apostle Paul's experience today in Acts. But she knows Jesus to be Messiah and she returns to her hometown, and she speaks out. Because *there is one more thing* about a boat that doesn't perhaps just readily come to mind. And that *one thing* is what Jesus used the boat for.

Jesus, as a result of his love and ministry and healing and caring for others, had gone viral as we would say. He couldn't go anywhere without the crowds pressing in upon him. And I imagine the Apostles had to act like bodyguards for Jesus at times just as the Romans did in Acts for Paul given Jesus could have been trampled by good intentions. The crowds were so stirred up because *all of them wanted to come in contact with the living God*. The masses were drowning for this. This is why we are told in Matthew 9:36 that when Jesus saw the crowds, he was "moved with compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a Shepherd," and Jesus came to earth to be that Good Shepherd. But so, in order for Jesus to teach the lost sheep—the large crowds, Jesus would stand in Peter's boat and have the boat put out a little way from the shore in order to preach the Gospel. Jesus used "the boat" to evangelize. And so there it is. Who knew that boats were used for this?

We row *this boat* to save others, and to build each other up...in order to carry on our Great Commission from Jesus Christ. Because it matters. It matters now and it matters for all eternity. And that it matters for all eternity is very clear, but I want to talk to you about why it matters now. Why it matters that we nurture our Naomi and Ruth relationships. I'll tell you why:

And I have never shared what I am about to share with you in public before. And certainly, never from a lectern. But if I am going to stand up here and preach to you about being vulnerable with one another and being courageous enough to step out of the boat, then I'm gonna step out of the boat alongside of you. I will tell you why what we are coming together to do in rowing the boat matters.

I grew up at the base of Camelback Mountain right over there. I lived in an affluent home attending Scottsdale Christian Academy and my mother was the Bible Teacher at what was then known as the *Church of All Christian Faiths* which is located just up the street. And from all outer appearances you would have thought that as a little girl I was doing just fine. But I was not. I lived in fear every day of my life because I was being molested by my earthly father. And so, I was terrified to be alone with him. I always felt okay or safe if my brother was with me, but not if I was with my father alone. But...being a little girl, I used to love to go to the Sugar Bowl Ice Cream restaurant in Old Town Scottsdale. And my earthly father knew this. He would take my brother and I there at times and we would eat ice cream. And "back in the day" at that time, the ice cream store had a bookstore attached to it. Talk about a childhood delight! We would go and eat ice cream and my earthly father would then let us pick out a book. And I always bought horse stories. But so, I loved going to the Sugar Bowl. But one night, my brother and I were riding back from somewhere in my father's Rolls Royce—cuz that's what he drove us around in given he had inherited the plastic molds company that made all the bottle caps for a

little company called Avon—but so my father is driving us back home from somewhere and we pull into the driveway, and he asks us if we would like to go to the Sugar Bowl, and I say, “Yes!” But then my brother said, “No, I don’t want to go.” And so, I quickly said, “I don’t want to go either.” But my dad said, “No you’re going.” And he let my brother David out of the car. And I was *horrified*.

And so, I started praying, because my brother was not with me. And I prayed inside my heart with all my heart saying, “Dear Jesus, at least *you’ll* be with me. Dear Jesus, at least *you’ll* be with me, at least *you’ll* be with me, at least *you’ll* be with me,” over and over again I prayed this in my heart. And Jesus *was* with me. Jesus came and stood next to me on that horrifying evening, when I felt a giant wave was about to sweep over me, and Jesus gave me courage and he kept me safe. Nothing bad happened to me that night. And there is only one reason for that. And that is *Jesus*. And I think to myself, what if I *had not known Jesus*?

There are young girls around us drowning. All around our battered world. This is a very immediate and pressing need. And it is not always or only *the obvious* little girls who are drowning. Which means we need to be ever vigilant, and we need to keep rowing this boat. Our Lord Jesus tells us that the harvest is plentiful but that the workers are few. And so, we are here because some of you may have been rowing this boat for a very long time and your arms are getting tired and you are needing to be spelled off by other sisters who are taking on leadership roles in order to row so that those who have been rowing for a long time can do a different form of service while still continuing with our commission. I mean – you *never leave* the boat. But you may be called to do something different: Like make sushi in the bow of the boat to feed the rowers; or whatever the cases may be...I mean I don’t know – I’m just running with the boat analogies for now, and so, you see...we never depart from the mission of rowing the boat, given God’s children are in danger of drowning. And sometimes it is full grown women who are drowning. And today, Jesus prays for all of us. Jesus prays for his disciples but also for those whom the disciples are to reach. In other words, Jesus prays today for both us as leaders and the ones we are to save. Today in our Gospel Jesus says to us, “My prayer is not for you alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through your message.”

And by virtue of the fact that God personally chose each and every one of you to be here at this “Rowing the Boat” workshop, (or chose you *to be reading about* the “Rowing the Boat” workshop...) I suspect I know the answer to this already, but the question to you today, is: “Are you on board?” *Amen*.