

# Sermon Text for May 3, 2020

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Jonah 1:7-10, Acts 27:33-38

## ***“Finding refuge in the midst of the storm”***

So how are you brothers and sisters in Christ, friends and family? What are you doing during this time to pass the time away, to keep sane, to keep busy, to keep yourself from falling into that sense of every day is groundhog day? Some people have found things on television to watch, series or movies. Tiger King apparently is a big deal, we haven't gotten around to having any desire to watch that yet. Not sure what we are missing. We have chosen select movies, those with sequels and watched them. We watched all of the Star Wars movies in order of when they came out. Love the good vs. evil them and good always winning out even though evil has a tremendous impact upon all those around. Just this past week we watched all 3 of the High School Musicals, what? As if you don't like them. I like them. I love that theme of “We are all in this together.” Isn't that the theme that we need to hear more of these days? The more we try to chip away as an individual at what is happening around us, the less we feel that we have any control. But the more we are unified and together and the more we recognize that we are all in this together, the better off we are. I'm not sure I've every used High School musical as an example in my sermon before, but there you have it.

Both of our Scriptures for today find the protagonists on ships in the midst of the storm and their lives are in danger as they are adrift. Both of our Scriptures today find our protagonists with a group of strangers on this same ship and there is a need for them to act together in a concerted effort in order to find refuge in the midst of the storm. The more an individual removes themselves from this scene, the less chance there is of survival. We find ourselves in the midst of a storm. I define it as a time of passion even as Easter has fallen on us and we are celebrating our fourth Sunday of Easter today. What we will find today in our Scripture is that our task is to trust in God who will see us through. Our task is to stay together as a community. Our task is to spring into action so that when the storm passes, and it will pass, then we are better equipped for what comes next.

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

Without a doubt we find ourselves in a storm. Over 70,000 people have died from the virus, well over a million have tested positive. Our economy is in shambles and people are getting more and more upset about our current political, economic, and health climate in which we find ourselves. This is a reality that I think we can all agree is true. We are told that

churches just might be the last to open. For me it is interesting that you can quantify the death and the sickness and the loss of jobs. But what is not quantifiable is the fear that people will carry with them of being in community and being in groups of folks as we gather to worship, or as we eat a meal together, or as we celebrate Christmas Eve together or preschool Sunday all events that were such a joy because they gathered so many people from the community in one place.

What is it going to look like once this is over. What is not quantifiable for me right now is the scar and the intangible mark that it will leave on us which could be more insidious and more life taking than what we are experiencing now. Our nation changed after 9-11 to a nation that was fearful. I'm afraid that after this our fear will become even more institutionalized than it already is, which I think is completely antithetical to what we are trying to do in here, which is to cast out fear. We are going to have an even tougher row to hoe once this is over, but I'm up to the challenge, and I hope you are too as a body.

Jonah today finds himself in a storm, a physical storm which we find that he actually created. Because of his actions, his running away from God, his refusal to follow and listen to, and obey the voice of God which was around him, he created this storm which is putting his co-sailors in danger. To me I see Jonah as someone who thinks he can go forward with his life and fall asleep where he wants and he is completely oblivious to how his actions, his decisions, his self-made cocoon has an effect on those around him. Jonah is completely passive in this story.

The sailors spend most of their time trying to figure out who is to blame for the storm. There really is not anyone leading this ship as it goes through the storm, it continues to drift while the sailors try to discern at least who to blame so that when they die they know whose fault it is. No one is taking any action that is going to provide any kind of refuge, until Jonah, after these verses, offers himself for the team. It was still a selfish act because he really didn't care what happened to him. His life was already over because God had given him a suicide mission. Jonah's offer of himself does right the situation and does provide refuge for the sailors on the ship, even though it places Jonah in an even more difficult spot than before.

Paul is different in his actions and in his decision making. He is the definition of calm in the midst of the storm and it is because of his leadership and the way in which he insists that we be team players which saves the ship and which brings the sailors on the ship to a place where they can actually work together and have hope for the future.

Let's set the stage. Paul is a prisoner and since he has appealed to Rome he is on a prisoner or slave ship that leaves Caesarea, where he was on trial before Agrippa and Festus, and the ship is making its way to Rome. But once it leaves Crete a storm comes up and it drives the ship into the middle of the Mediterranean and it is completely adrift. All those on board expect the worst, that the ship would be lost, the ship would be lost. In these verses before where we picked up they were without food for 14 days and this was by choice, because they did not know when they would be saved so they wanted to save the food as much as they could. I think it is also because they were fasting in order to discern the will of God.

After this time God speaks to Paul and tells him that they will all be saved, that they should not worry. It is here where he takes control because he has a plan now which was given to him directly by God. Now, there were some on the ship who wanted to escape and they lowered boats in order to get away from the ship, and Paul ordered that the ropes to the boats be cut so that no one could escape. There is a huge difference between escape and refuge. An escape provides nothing for the long term. It is focused specifically on the individual and away from the group. A refuge is a place where you are safe and where together you can get there, but only if you remain together.

Many today are looking for an escape and mistaking that for a refuge. Those who want to get out there and return to life as normal are looking for an escape because in the end their going out will affect and harm all the rest of us on this ship. Those who tried to get on the boats were only interested in their future and did not have the good of the others on the ship in mind. Paul in this situation makes a Joe Namath guarantee. He tells those on the ship that not a single hair on your head will be harmed. You will all make. I am telling you that we will make it through this time, but we need to be able to seek that refuge together and not try an easy escape that will place us out of God's will.

Notice what Paul states in vs.33, you have all been in suspense. We have all been in suspense for what comes next. We know what it is like to be on the ship tossed about in the middle of the storm with your ship mates a bit too close for comfort now for nearly two months. We just need a day with a little breathing room, we think we need an escape, but in reality we need a refuge. In this Scripture we know that Paul was assured that he would arrive in Rome and that everyone on the ship would be spared. So he gathers people up in the midst of the storm, in the midst of no end in sight, and they take part in what is for us one of the most comforting events in our Christian life, which is the sacrament of communion.

Paul provides for those on that ship together a life giving act that gives them not only encouragement for the present, but hope for the future. Today, our refuge in the storm is communion. It isn't going to take us out of storm, but it will provide us with a refuge in the midst of the storm. The question people around us are asking is what will the response of the church be in the midst of discouragement and fear, in the midst of the storm, and our response is to provide refuge for any and all who might seek it. We are not about temporary escapes which leaves you worse off than before you came into contact with us. No, we are about providing permanent refuge that we find in our Savior Jesus Christ.

You know that Acts was written by Luke and throughout the entire Gospel of Luke you find Jesus in the midst of a storm and he provides the same meal that Paul does here in vs.35. Read this verse and then we read in Luke 9:16, and then again in Luke 22:19, and then again in Luke 24:30. Jesus is a waymaker who provides us refuge in the eye of the storm and that refuge is found in this meal in front of us.

But what good can communion do for us in this time of crisis? This meal witnesses to our confidence in God's will to give us what we need even in the midst of the storm, the church not only feeds itself but witnesses to the world. The ship contained 276 people which is about the number that will watch this service today online throughout the world. Communion is food of confidence shared in the middle of the storm.

The refuge that we are providing today to you in the midst of the storm in which we find ourselves is communion. Look what happens in vs.36 after they ate the meal. They were all encouraged. If you are worshipping with us today and after we celebrate the Lord's Supper today you are encouraged then we have done what we have been tasked to do. But it doesn't end with encouragement, even though if that is where it ended that would be okay too. Look what happens in vs.38, they were encouraged and then they took action. They lightened the load that was on the ship so that they would be ready for what comes next.

Following the meal the rejuvenated company moves into action. The effect of this meal is remarkable. It produces encouragement. They are ready for what comes next while they are in the midst of the storm. This story invites us to picture Paul doing what Jesus does and in turn what the church does, giving thanks to God by breaking bread and eating. Our refuge together today is found on this table. A refuge in the midst of the storm. They were encouraged, and we should be encouraged as well.

Paul states in vs.34 to the sailors: “I urge you to take some food, for it will help you survive.” It will encourage you, it will motivate you to action, it will provide you a refuge in the midst of the storm. Amen.