

Three Hour Tour
Acts 27:33-44
The Rev. Mary Kathleen Duncan
August 3, 2025

³³ Just before daybreak, Paul urged all of them to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have been in suspense and remaining without food, having eaten nothing. ³⁴ Therefore I urge you to take some food, for it will help you survive, for none of you will lose a hair from your heads.” ³⁵ After he had said this, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶ Then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves. ³⁷ (We were in all two hundred seventy-six persons in the ship.) ³⁸ After they had satisfied their hunger, they lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea.

³⁹ In the morning they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach on which they planned to run the ship ashore, if they could. ⁴⁰ So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea. At the same time they loosened the ropes that tied the steering-oars; then hoisting the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach. ⁴¹ But striking a reef, they ran the ship aground; the bow stuck and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the force of the waves. ⁴² The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none might swim away and escape; ⁴³ but the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land ⁴⁴ and the rest to follow, some on planks and others on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

From 1986 until 2003 the sitcom Gilligan’s Island aired each morning at 8:05a on TBS. This means that, literally, for the entirety of my childhood, this show was in syndication daily. I was born in 1986 and graduated high school in 2004.

I recall watching Gilligan’s Island on many sick days home from school and many summer mornings with my siblings. For those younger than me, syndication is a term that refers to a network re-airing a television show in a non-prime time spot. I grew up in the days of no Netflix, no Prime Video, no Disney Plus. All we had were the channels available based on your cable plan (or lack thereof) and what they were showing at certain times. We didn’t even have TiVo. You couldn’t record a show to watch later, unless of course you recorded it on your VHS player and rewatched it via tape. For those older than me, perhaps you watched Gilligan’s

Island in its primetime spot (Saturdays at 8:30p for the first season, Thursdays at 8p for the second season, and Mondays at 7:30p for the third and final season) from 1964-1967. Maybe you even recall the entire first season being in black and white (it was later colorized for syndication). The theme song for this beloved sitcom is an earworm if there ever was an earworm. All it took this past week was for me to hear the first few notes of the song and I could sing it in its entirety.

All it took this past week was for me to hear the first few notes of the song and I could not get it out of my head...

*The weather started getting rough,
The tiny ship was tossed,
If not for the courage of the fearless crew
The minnow would be lost, the minnow would be lost.*

*The ship set ground on the shore of this uncharted desert isle
With Gilligan
The Skipper too,
The millionaire and his wife,
The movie star
The professor and Mary Ann,
Here on Gilligan's Isle.*

Regardless of whether we watched the show in black and white, in prime time, or via syndication, can we all agree that the premise of Gilligan's Island was a little fantastical? I mean, 7 people depart from Honolulu on a relatively small motorboat for a three-hour site-seeing trip and suddenly find themselves shipwrecked on an uncharted tropical island with no inhabitants. And no one rescues them for three years? Over 98 episodes, they welcome countless visitors (how did they get there?) and are able to craft some very fancy things (lie detector test, a pedal powered car, all manner of fashion items) with only what the island provides. Nearly every episode chronicles an attempt to be rescued that Gilligan always thwarts. It's pretty far-fetched and always wildly entertaining.

Lauren preached on the story of Paul and Silas in jail from Acts 16 last week. Between chapters 16 and 27, where we find ourselves today, much happens in the life and ministry of Paul. After being released from jail that time, Paul visited many communities where he preached the gospel and established churches – Beroea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Macedonia, and finally, back to Jerusalem. It is in Jerusalem that Paul is again arrested. And he never leaves custody

between being arrested in Jerusalem in Acts 21 and setting sail for Rome in chapter 27. Our text from today starts mid-chapter, but the action surrounding this episode begins with verse 27:1 where the stage is set –

“When it was determined that we were to sail to Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were placed in the custody of a centurion named Julius.” During the journey that follows, the ship passes the famous islands of Cyprus and Crete before encountering a “violent” storm that “batters” the ship. Their situation is so perilous that they throw all cargo overboard in hopes of that helping them to survive. The storm lasts 14 nights before the sailors begin to sense that land is near. This is where we pick up the story.

On the one hand, the story of Paul’s shipwreck on his way to Rome is, like the premise of Gilligan’s Island, a bit fantastical. A storm that lasted 14 days? The light of the sun and moon unavailable to guide the crew? The appearance of an angel? 276 people and no one was lost? On the other hand, it is also very relatable and shares some rich truths. From the beginning of recorded human history- from the Bible to the Epic of Gilgamesh to the Odyssey- we hear stories of humans facing the power of water – surviving (or not surviving) floods, traversing the oceans to reach new places, pushing back the water in order to build civilizations.

And we still hear and tell and watch these stories today. We even have one of those stories, set in and around our state’s own Edisto Island, featured in this week’s Harbinger article. I, myself, grew up boating and married into a boating family. David’s grandfather started a business over 50 years ago called “Duncan’s Boats” and my father-in-law ran it for much of his career. I’ve been on many different types of watercrafts with my family members in many types of weather over the years. I’ve been caught in a storm while on a jet ski off the coast of central Florida, I’ve stayed on a boat for a week in the Keys twice, I’ve approached uninhabited islands on dinghies, I’ve broken down in the middle of Lake Hartwell the night before a big accounting exam necessitating a rescue by the local Sea Tow guys. Stories about water and ship mishaps and the power of the ocean are fantastical because water IS powerful. It is also life-giving, life-taking, awe-inspiring and unpredictable. This summer has taught us this in a tragic way as we have mourned the loss of life in the hill country of Texas to flooding over the 4th of July weekend.

Like water itself, life is also awe-inspiring and unpredictable. Paul’s story of a shipwreck is relatable to us because, yes, many of us have a boating kerfuffle to tell but also because we are human beings who traverse the figurative storms of life – an unexpected diagnosis, loss of a job or benefits, the tragic loss of a family member, a home being destroyed by a natural disaster, the dissolution of a marriage...the list goes on. While we all may not be from boating families,

we all face the storms of life. And these storms are hard to navigate. Difficult to survive. Sometimes seemingly impossible to recover from.

Twelve years ago, during the summer I was pregnant with my first child, I came across a song that stuck with me. I was introduced to it at the Montreat Youth Conference. It is by Josh Garrels, and it entitled, "Pilot Me".

*I will arise and follow you over
Savior please, pilot me*

*Over the waves and through every sorrow
Savior please, pilot me*

*When I have no more strength left to follow
Fall on my knees, pilot me*

*May your sun rise and lead me on
Over the seas, savior pilot me*

The summer of 2013 was not easy for me. I struggled with morning sickness every single day of my pregnancy. For 9 months I felt horrible. And while I was so excited about having a child, it was our first. So, there were a lot of worries and unknowns. Would we be good parents? Would we know what to do? Could we deal with the sleepless nights? Were we prepared with everything we needed? How would I do my job and be a parent? I was in murky, uncharted waters. And this song comforted me and grounded me in God's guidance and care. It also became an earworm of the very best sort.

The story of Paul's shipwreck, while fantastical and full of intrigue and adventure, also grounds us in the truths of God.

- **God is with us in the storms.**

Not only did Paul never doubt God's presence and convey that belief to all onboard with him, an angel appeared to further remind him of that and to tell him what to expect.

- **God uses the storms to bring about holy purposes.**

I don't think God causes horrible storms, on earth or in life, but God does use them. Paul didn't just survive so Paul could survive. Paul survived so that he could bring the good news of the gospel to yet another new place. The very center of a very powerful empire. The city of Rome. This was a huge move for God's kingdom on earth and enabled the good news to spread like

wildfire throughout the world in a way it hadn't up until this point. Can you imagine if Paul had never reached Rome...

- **We have one another and signs of grace to help us through.**

Water and bread mean something to us as Christians. They are visible signs of the invisible grace of God in our lives. The grace that is with us in times of joy and sorrow, kind seas and wild storms. These signs were available to Paul in a very tangible way, and he was able to share these signs with others. Will Willimon, from his wonderful commentary on Acts, puts it this way:

*"In the ultimate act of confidence, Paul urges his companions to eat. He took bread, blessed it, broke it, and began to eat. This repetition of the familiar fourfold table action by which the risen Lord was revealed is a source of encouragement for all on board. What is the response of the church in the midst of discouragement and fear? Like Paul, the church takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and begins to eat. 'What good will that do?' the world may ask. In this sign of hope in the power and presence of God, this Eucharistic witness 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."*¹

Y'all, in just a few moments we get to be a part of this fourfold table celebration. It is for us, but it is also so that we might be strengthened and equipped to be witnesses to the world. I invite you to bring your worries regarding current storms with you to the table. May God lead and guide you.

I invite you to bring trauma and hurt from past storms to the table with you. Let God receive and heal you. I invite you to bring your grief over the storms that swirl in the world, in places similar and dissimilar to us and in the lives of those we love and the lives of those we do not even know. Allow God to comfort and sustain you. Y'all, let us feed ourselves so that we may survive the storm and serve others. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

¹ Acts, Willimon, p. 184.