

5. RE-SENT

Sharing God as good news in the aftermath

Acts 27:13-44

Meeting fear with faith

The spiritual atmospherics of any generation are a bit like the changeable weather we experience in Ireland - very hard to read. In any one day there can be the equivalent of sunshine and showers, even the odd rumble of thunder or bolt of lightning. So how will the culture in which we are sent to share Jesus have changed due to the coronavirus? There will be no one answer to that question. The hardened atheist will still say these things happen in a world governed by nothing more than chance and natural selection. The religious fanatic will still interpret the coronavirus as the judgment of God on a world turned away from his ways. And there will be everything in between in the views of people we know and to whom God sends us to share his good news. For many the idea of God as good news at all will be hard to stomach. They are more likely to see him as culprit or cause of coronavirus.

– TO TALK ABOUT –

Q. What do you sense is the spiritual atmosphere as a result of the coronavirus pandemic?

One thing that is indisputable in the aftermath of coronavirus is the growth of a culture of fear. Before the pandemic, life went on as though human progress had made us invincible. There was a sense that nothing that could shake our Western way of life economically, scientifically, socially, ethically and commercially. As the reality that a tiny virus could stop the whole world in its tracks set in, that myth we had lived with for a long time exploded without warning. Fear was suddenly everywhere. Its spread eclipsed that of the pandemic itself. It cast its dark shadow over the news. It was tangible as we stood in shop queues. It expressed itself in conversation as we shared our everyday views.

So, how will we live and speak into this culture of fear as God resends us into a world that has experienced pandemic to be witnesses to the truth and power of the gospel of peace?

Let's have a look at a story from Acts 27:13-44 in which Paul models how to meet fear with faith as he experienced stormy seas with a ship full of hardened unbelievers. As we do so let's reflect on how it might guide us in sharing Jesus in the aftermath of the pandemic.

PARALLELS AND

PATTERNS

Read Acts 27:13-44.

Do so slowly. Listen carefully. Pay attention to the details. Reflect on how things feel at different parts of the story. Let the story sink into your soul.

– TO TALK ABOUT –

PARALLELS

Line up the story alongside your recent experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Use the questions below to help identify and talk about some parallels.

The sailors set off believing that they could ride out any storm by clever sailing technique (v13). In no time at all they find themselves at the mercy of a hurricane force storm (v14). They are no longer able to manage, they find themselves carried along by events outside of their control (v15). They still do what they can, but fear has set in (v17). They finally give up all hope of being saved (v20).

Q. How does this set of circumstances parallel some of what we saw happen in society during the period of pandemic?

Paul is in the boat at the time all this is happening. The sailors and soldiers with whom he was sharing the journey would have known who he was and that he was a prisoner going to stand trial before Caesar because he was a follower of Jesus.

Q. How do you think Paul felt as he experienced the storm as a follower of Jesus? Was he totally free from fear? What fears has the experience of the pandemic brought to the surface in your life? Did you have fears? How did your faith in God help you counter fear? With which unbelievers did you share the journey?

Talk about other parallels you can see between the story and our situation today.

PATTERNS

Line up the story alongside your recent experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Use the questions below to help identify and talk about some patterns for living as followers of Jesus.

Paul stands up and speaks to the sailors about God twice in the story. The first time, he strikes a fine balance between pointing out how they hadn't listened to what he had said to them before, encouraging them that they need not be lost, offering hope and inviting them to share his faith in God (vv21-25).

Q. What do we feel we most want to say to unbelievers in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic? Where might we need to temper that, or be less timid, to strike the kind of balance that Paul patterns for us here?



The second time Paul speaks, he offers practical advice (v31), pastoral concern that they eat (v33-34) and prayer (v35). In the end the ship runs aground and is broken to pieces on the rocks just as Paul said it would be in verse 26 (v41). But Paul has left an impression on the centurion in whose charge he was a prisoner because he stops the soldiers from killing Paul (vv42-43).

Q. What have we learned so far about practical, pastoral and prayerful witness as we have lived through the period of the pandemic? What might that look like in bearing witness to people picking up the pieces in the aftermath of its effects? What do we hope will leave an impression for God on their life?

Talk about other patterns of who God is and how he acts, or lessons that we can learn in living as his followers and his church, that emerge from this story.

POSSIBILITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

– TO TALK ABOUT –

POSSIBILITIES

Take a moment to think about the initial impression this story made upon you as you read it and the discussion that you have just had. What sticks in your mind? What do you particularly sense God prompting you to think more deeply about?

Pause and take a moment on your own, or share with the person next to you, your sense of what God is saying to you or your congregation from your reflections on this story?

PERSPECTIVES

Prepare to share with others what impression God has made upon your heart. Do your best to put this into words. Maybe it will be the same as others, maybe it will be different. Pay attention to the conversation that is about to start so that God can deepen and widen the impact of his Word.

Share with the whole group the lessons you think God is teaching you and your congregation through his Word, by his Spirit.

PATHWAYS TO PURSUE

– TO TALK AND PRAY ABOUT –

Thinking

What has reading this story against the background of your experience of the period of coronavirus pandemic caused you to think again about?

Living

In what specific ways will that make you change the way you live as a follower of Jesus? How might it reshape an aspect of your congregation's life?

Praying

Pray together for strength to follow through on what God has taught each person and the implications for your life together as a congregation.

PROMISE AND

PRAYER

PROMISE

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8

PRAYER

God of every age and people,
as Jesus sent his first followers out into city, country
and cultures not their own,
we ask for the same promised Spirit's power,
as we are re-sent in witness to the world in which we find
ourselves today.

Give us sensitivity to spiritual atmospherics,
ears for people's fears,
practical, pastoral and prayerful concern,
winsome invitations to the lost,
to find hope and faith in Jesus,
that a troubled world might know his peace and restoration.
In Jesus' name.

Amen

