

# Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

**Date** : 13 Mar 2022

**Sermon Title** : Real Faith in Real Life

**Speaker** : Rev John Foo

**Text** : Acts 27:1-44

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## INTRODUCTION

About a month back, Storm Eunice started battering the western parts of Europe. It left a trail of devastation and deaths. Rooftops were ripped off houses, planes had trouble landing, flights were cancelled. Almost everything was blown away by the gale-force winds. This morning, we are looking at a story in Acts 27 in which the apostle Paul was caught in a bad storm. Sometimes, we may find ourselves in the same stormy predicament as Paul.

Nobody can avoid the 'storms' in lives. Rather than looking at the storm, let us focus on how Paul lived out his faith in the midst of the storm and difficult circumstances he faced. From there, let us consider how we can practise our faith in the storms of our lives, not only physical storms but trials and crises that we face in life, because these storms will try our souls and test our faith.

## Real Faith in Real Life

We talk a lot about faith in Christian settings in church, in Christian gatherings and small group meetings. In sermons we preach faith, in worship we proclaim faith, in bible study we study or explain faith and in evangelism we share faith. But when we step out into the real world where challenges and difficulties await us, we start wondering why we struggle in trusting God. We wonder if we have real faith that can operate in the real world. It is easier to talk about faith when the setting is comfortable than to practise faith in the midst of a 'storm' or crisis.

## 2 points of focus:

1. One thing that could potentially steer our faith off course – **Bad Decisions**
2. One thing to rest our faith on whenever we encounter storms in our life – **Presence and Promise of God**

## 1. Bad decisions

### Bad decisions made (Acts 27:11)

The centurion Julius chose to listen to the pilot and owner of the ship and not to Paul. On the surface, it may seem that there was nothing wrong with this decision

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as the professional pilot ought to know how to sail the ship and the owner of the ship had the right to decide what he wanted to do with his ship.

- Paul was not talking about how to sail a ship but was referring to the weather, something he was familiar with since he had been on several missionary journeys. Paul had been shipwrecked three times (2 Corinthians 11:25) and so would have encountered similar kinds of weather out at sea. He would have known that at that time of the year, sea voyages would be very dangerous, thus advising the centurion and the others not to set sail.
- The ship had already encountered bad weather earlier in the journey. (Acts 27:7-8) They had great difficulty sailing in the open seas because of the strong winds and it took them longer than usual to land at Fair Havens. Despite this, the centurion and the others decided to put out to sea again.
- They decided that the harbour at Fair Haven was not comfortable enough for them to spend the winter in. They would rather take the risk of sailing to another harbour in Phoenix to spend the winter, choosing comfort over safety.

**Paul did not let the bad decisions made stumble his faith** – even when those bad decisions landed him in yet another shipwreck. (Acts 27:39-44)

## Bad decisions made can affect us

When we encounter a big storm in our lives, we sometimes can barely muster enough faith in God to keep ourselves afloat. It is already tough enough to have to contend with storms in our lives. Along the way, sometimes, bad decisions will be made by us or those around us in response to the crisis/storm. When bad decisions are made that aggravate the whole situation, it can make things unbearable for us to cope with and our faith takes a beating.

- We often start questioning God or blaming Him for adding to our torment and suffering when it is actually the bad decisions made by others or ourselves that worsen our troubles.
- Even though it is true that when God calls us to do something, He will make a way for us, the journey may not necessarily be smooth or easy. Making a way and making the way smooth are two different things.
- God can effect His divine purpose even through extended suffering brought about by bad decisions. God is still in control and will cause the extended suffering and trials to work out for our good.

**God allows bad decisions to be made but He will work through those things for our good** – this is what our faith ought to rest on.

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## 2. Presence and Promise of God

God's presence and promise to Paul (Acts 23:11, Acts 27:23-24)

- God told Paul in Jerusalem to take courage as he must testify about Him in Rome. (Acts 23:11) An angel of the Lord appeared to Paul again in the storm while he was on the ship bound for Rome. (Acts 27:23-24) The angel told Paul not to be afraid as he would stand before Caesar in Rome and assured him that God would preserve him and the lives of all those with him on the ship even though the ship would be lost.
- Paul had the presence of God with him when the angel of God appeared to give him the word of God. The angel only appeared to Paul because the rest had either lost faith in God or didn't believe in God. It was the presence of God which gave Paul the confidence to know that he would be saved. The rest despaired because they were looking at the violent storm and huge waves while Paul was looking at God.
- The rest were looking at the ship to save them and threw everything overboard. Paul was looking to God to save him and didn't throw anything overboard. In fact, he was clinging to the promise of God.

**Presence of storm does not mean absence of God** – Paul never doubted the presence of God. Instead of questioning and blaming God for the storm that threatened his life, Paul kept his faith and rested in God's presence and promise.

Faith looks to the presence and promise of God

- It is precisely because of the storm that God is there to see us through; God does not leave us alone. When we find ourselves in the storms of our lives, we should know that the presence and promise of God are there for us.
- All of us are in the midst of a big storm – the COVID pandemic and some of us are struggling in it. Even if we are not sick, we would know of family members or friends who have been or are COVID positive. There may be other storms that come along with the COVID storm affecting your employment or studies. All the more we need to trust the presence and promise of God. We need to keep our faith in God intact rather than on what is happening around us.

**We can keep our faith in God because God is greater than what is happening in this world.**

## CONCLUSION

We do not have to be afraid of storms we go through even though we may not understand God's divine reasons for allowing them to happen. However, we can be sure that God will see us through all the storms in life, even crises brought about by bad decisions. May we, in faith, cling on to God's presence and promise so we can exercise real faith in real life when going through storms in our lives.

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As a group, spend some time to share your success and struggle in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do at the previous meeting.

## **A. Review Sermon Content**

***Purpose: Reflect on one key takeaway.***

Appoint someone to read Acts 27:1-44, slowly.

1. At the end of the reading, the reader will say, "This is the Word of the Lord."

All to respond, "Thanks be to God." Our response reminds us that this is the Word of the Lord. Just as God had spoken to His people in the past, He is still speaking to us even today, right now."

- a. As God's Word was read, which verse speaks to you the most?
  - b. (i) What is the key takeaway for you from the sermon "Real Faith in Real Life"?
  - (ii) How will you align the way you live to your key takeaway?

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## **B. Relate Sermon Content**

***Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.***

2. Paul chose to focus on God's presence and promise when he encountered a storm that threatened the lives of all those on board the ship.
  - a. How do you think Paul's faith in the midst of the storm impacted the other passengers of the ship?
  - b. What is one way you can live out a real faith in your daily life whether at home, work, school, church or community, to testify to God's presence and promises to others around you?
  
- 3a. Compare how Paul dealt with the life threatening storm/crisis he was in (Acts 17:1-44) with how you handle a real storm/crisis in your life. Is there any similarity or difference?
  
- 3b. (i) What are some challenges that may hinder you from trusting God fully when you go through a storm/crisis in life?  
  
(ii) What is one thing you can do to overcome these challenges?
  
- 3c. How can your group members help or encourage you to achieve 3b(ii) above, for the following week(s) till your next meeting?

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## **C. Testimonies and Prayer**

***Purpose: Give glory to God and seek Him.***

4. Share your personal testimony of how God helped you live out your faith in a challenging situation in your life.

OR

Give thanks to God that He is able to turn situations that involve bad human decisions into good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

5. With a prayer partner, bring all that have been shared in 3a, 3b and 3c to God, asking Him to help you live out real faith in real life where facing 'storms' is part and parcel of life.

As a group, spend some time to discuss and seek the Holy Spirit's guidance on what your group can do to encourage each other to press on in trusting God's presence and promises in spite of difficult circumstances such as the COVID pandemic, its restrictions, rising cost of living, unstable employment or income, stress at work/school, chronic pain/ill health, onerous caregiving duties, difficult or broken relationships and others in our lives. Commit your group's plan to the Lord and seek the Spirit's enablement to live out real faith even in difficult times.

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