

Sermon preached by: Edward Pines – 12 July 2015 – Sea Sunday – St John the Baptist – Anglican Church – Pinetown.

Theme: These men have seen the works of God.

Collect: Almighty God, you led your people through the sea, and made a path for them in deep waters: be near all those who face the dangers of the seas; protect them from disaster, help them on their way, and bring them safely to their desired haven with hearts thankful for your mercy. In Jesus name we pray, AMEN.

OT: Jonah 1: 17 – 2: 10

Psalm: 107: 1 – 3, 23 – 32

Gospel: Matthew 8: 23 – 27

Today's OT reading sounds a little bit like one of those fisherman's yarns. The one that got away! If you do know or have met up with a fisherman you will' I am sure, have heard that type of story.

Was it a "large fish" or a whale? Does it make any difference to the message of the story?

The truth of the matter is that Jonah was trying to avoid going in the direction where God had asked him to go. He did not wish to go to the City of Nineveh, which had a reputation of being a City that was full of wickedness; so he jumped on a ship heading in the opposite direction. The ship found itself struck by a great storm that was so severe it threatened to capsize the ship. The crew of the ship were so afraid for their lives that they were praying to their gods to be saved!

Deciding that it was Jonah's fault that they were in this storm the crew asked him to pray to his God for their safety. Jonah, realising that it was because of his disobedience to God that the ship was in this storm; he begged that he be thrown overboard!

Reluctantly the crew granted his wish, and as Jonah was cast into the sea, immediately the storm abated, the wind stopped and the sea became calm. Swallowed by the fish, Jonah cried out to God for forgiveness. Heeding the Prophet's anguished prayer the Lord spoke to

the fish and it vomited out Jonah upon dry land.

Once again God directed Jonah to go and preach in the City of Nineveh. This time he obeyed and went into Nineveh, preaching and calling the people of that city to repent of their evil and wicked ways.

And the sailors on that ship that was caught in the violent storm what of them? We read an answer to this question in the Psalm this morning, Psalm 107: 23 – 30. Yes those who go to sea and work on ships, have many opportunities to witness the wonders of God in calm and in storm. And it is important that we remember all seafarers in our prayers.

In the Gospel Matthew 8: 23 – 27 we heard another sea story of how the disciples are in a boat with Jesus when a storm arose so great that they feared for their lives. They wake Jesus who was sleeping thinking that the boat was going to be swamped by the huge waves. The disciples full of fear for their safety ask Jesus to save them! You will remember that Jesus rebukes the wind and the sea and there was an immediate calm!

Have you responded to God's call? Are you trying to avoid making a decision and heading in the opposite direction?

We are all invited to participate in a journey of discipleship.

When was the last time you felt that Christ was taking you on a journey? Have you climbed into the boat, or do you prefer to stand on the shore?

Part of my own journey took me literally away to sea working on ships, which I did for 23 years serving as a marine engineer. Today we are observing Sea Sunday – when we remember the work of the Mission to Seafarers and all those who work on ships and with seafarers.

I have frequently been asked, “Wasn’t it dangerous being on a ship at sea?” For sure the work has its dangers and safety is a number one priority. When an incident does arise, like a severe storm with huge seas flowing! You will frequently hear colleagues praying aloud for God to spare them!

It is when things do go wrong and when seafarers are in need of physical help that the Mission to Seafarers comes to the fore with help and support.

It was during severe weather with large seas running off the kZN coast, that a bulk carrier, loaded with coal sailing from Richards Bay ran aground as it was leaving the port, fortunately clear of the port entrance. As the ship was severely damaged and breaking up, all the crew were airlifted off the ship. It was the Mission to Seafarers who looked after these seafarer’s welfare and made arrangements for them to contact their families and loved ones back home. You can see a picture of this incident in the leaflet that you can collect from the back of the church on your way out this morning.

It is nearly 90% of the world’s trade that is carried on ships, and the Mission to Seafarers has over 121 centres in over 260 ports in 71 countries around the world ministering to seafarers. We have such a centre in Durban and it is from there that chaplains and volunteer helpers go out to visit the ships while they are in the port. It is then when the seafarer’s receive the woollen hats knitted by

faithful supporters, some from this parish. The seafarers are also able to visit the centre. Over the years the facilities in these centres have developed and now provide internet services to assist seafarers communicating with family etc. back home.

A seafarer’s life can be both hazardous and lonely, with long periods away from family and friends. I certainly experienced times of loneliness during my own time at sea. It was at a particular phase in my own journey of discipleship when I first went to sea. Some of you may be aware that I first came to Africa as a member of the Society of the Sacred Mission, I was Brother Edward SSM, a monk living under the vows of Obedience; Poverty (Simplicity) and Celibacy; in 1975 I was asked by this Religious Order to make a “Life Promise”. It would have been easy to say yes, I would have been looked after by the order for the rest of my life and carried on with my work. But! Would it have been honest? Was it really what God was asking of me? Was this path that I was on to be my correct journey of discipleship?

I asked for some “time out” to go away and reassess my calling. The community that I was living and working in was a very open community. Open for people to come in to us, and open for members to go out and minister in the community. For this “time out” I chose to go away to sea working on a ship.

I exchanged that open community for an enclosed community as part of a multi-cultural crew (24) isolated from land as we voyaged around the world. Between my hours of work there was time to pray and evaluate my situation, and also for some ministry and witness, among this new enclosed community that I now found myself in.

While at sea there were opportunities to experience the works of God and his wonders in the deep. For he spoke and raised the storm-wind and it lifted high the waves of the sea. Just as the psalmist said this morning.

I was able, with God's help, to make a decision for my future and chose to remain at sea, recognising that as my time with SSM was a journey of discipleship, so too this time at sea was to become a new path of the same journey. As also was my working as an academic for fifteen years after I eventually came ashore in 1998. Both being new paths on the same journey of discipleship.

When was the last time you felt that Christ was taking you on a journey? Have you climbed into the boat, or do you prefer to stand on the shore?

Jesus always takes his disciples on a journey and that has certainly been my own experience. Sometimes it is in order to discover new direction and purpose. It may be in order to overcome a fear. We heard that bold question from Jesus to his disciples this morning, "Why are you afraid?"

Do you have an area of your life where you have fear, pray to Christ and ask him to give you courage and boldness. Then step out in faith on your journey of discipleship, and be ready to experience the wonders and works of God.

Have you responded to God's call? Are you trying to avoid making a decision and heading in the opposite direction?

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When was the last time you felt that Christ was taking you on a journey? Have you climbed into the boat, or do you prefer to stand on the shore?

Be ready to share in the wonders of God, take courage, and be ready to step into the boat and begin travelling a new path on your journey of discipleship. AMEN.