

Rescued

November 3, 2024

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ online ministry. This week, we'll hear a story of rescue from a boat accident from Ruth, a missionary our congregation supports in Papua New Guinea. Thank you to Dave, Don and Janet for being part of the service. Please check out the description for a link to the video from Highland Church of Christ: https://youtu.be/DzgNHL_6hww

The scripture reading this week is Mark 4:35-41. There is some variability in the audio quality over the course of the service this week. We've added subtitling to our videos to help make things more intelligible. Transcripts are also available at beamsvillechurchofchrist.ca/sermons

Happy birthday this week to Jo.

Welcome, Announcements, Prayer

Welcome. I guess there's no penalty for starting a few seconds early, only if we go overtime. We have a birthday: Ivy, who is not here this morning, but may come in later and has a birthday, and that's all we have for birthdays and anniversaries.

I have one prayer request. Harold, a longtime member at Omagh, has experienced a stroke and is recovering in a stable condition in the hospital but is in for observation.

So if we remember him in our prayers. I'd like to have a word of prayer and then a brief reading and move on. Let's go to God.

Heavenly Father, you know our hearts. We recognize your ongoing presence and thank you for your indwelling spirit. We pray for Harold and for several other people with health concerns that are on our hearts. Some are recovering, some are being restored to health, and we are thankful for that. We ask that we may comfort those who are grieving the loss of loved ones and ask for your strength and to be empowered in Christ's name, it's in his name that we pray.

I thought, along the lines of being rescued from the sea, this may be an apt scripture. Psalm 89, verse 1, skip down to verse 5 through verse 9.

I will sing the words of the Lord's great love forever. With my mouth, I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. The heavens praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness, too, in the assembly of the holy ones. For whom in the skies above can compare with the Lord? Who is like the Lord among the heavenly beings? In the counsel of the holy ones, God is greatly feared. He is more awesome than all who surround him. O Lord God Almighty, who is like you, you are mighty, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds us. You rule over the surging sea, when the waves mount up, you still them.

Communion

Today I'd just like to share a few comments regarding communion. When I was first in Bible college in Troy, Ohio, I traveled over to Portland, Indiana and preached there. And I had to learn the organization of how that church, whatever church was a little bit different. But when it came to communion, I was used to being raised in a certain way where communion would be, you know, a dialogue. It would be maybe five minutes' length. Sometimes it would be very, very lengthy. And what other times it wasn't. But what I noticed was very brief comments.

When I first went to this particular church and ended up preaching there for a year, when it came to communion, it would be as simple as this. And it's not being negative, it's just the way it was. This is partaking of the body of Jesus and the one of Jesus. And that's partaking. That's about it. But that's- that is it.

It's all about Jesus. It's about His death for us. His shed blood for us. The sacrifice of sins. So I would ask you at this moment, if you would, if you would just bow your head for maybe 30 seconds or so and pray to yourself and then I'll finish with a prayer. Let's go ahead.

We thank you, O Lord, for allowing us to be here, to remember the love that you have given us, the sacrifice, the great, great sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We're so thankful that He's given up His body. Thank you that He shed His blood. We are not worthy that you make us worthy because of Him. In Christ's name, Amen.

Scripture Reading

Mark 4:35-41

That day, when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along just as he was in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, "Quiet, be still." Then the wind died down, and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this?" Even the wind and the waves obey him."

Sermon

Rescued

I have part of Ruth's newsletter reprinted and edited so it's not ten pages long. And I also wrote some notes for myself, which I scrawled out, so I hope I can read them. Anyhow, Ruth is a missionary in Papua New Guinea. She has been there 30 years. I was the 11 and a half. She's from Vineland, and she's supported by Beamsville and Tintern and Fenwick is her main sponsor.

And Ruth first came to Lae, Papua New Guinea in 1992 for a short term. She then went back to the Highland Street Church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee, where Joe Cannon was there. He was the starter of the church in Papua New Guinea, and he was teaching young people how to become missionaries. Joe and Rosabell, his wife started their work in Papua New Guinea in 1971. Then Ruth returned to Lae around 1994.

When I was there, there were several missionary families. Now Ruth is alone, just working with the national people. She's a very brave girl, I tell you. Ruth has translated a couple of books from Pidgin into the-- from English into the Pidgin language. She's done a lot of printing work, including the several books and the songbook, the Papua New Guinea songbook. Ruth teaches the children and the women at the Melanesian Bible College. She also started the school up in the Highlands. And Jab Mesa is the leader or the principal at the Melanesian Bible College. He was in visiting Canada and came here, quite a few years ago, with another young man.

One of Ruth's works, apart from her printing, and her teaching these children, was hosting guests that come from overseas, usually supporters. So she has supporters from Australia, the US, and Canada. And several times they have missional people coming from the Highland Street Church because they're the main sponsors of her original work. So this year, four people came, but one of them got delayed. So actually, only three really ended up...

OK, sometimes they are taken up to Highlands, which is very rough road with a very rough area to go. But this time, the plan was for Tami Island, which is just off, around the corner from the coast of Lae, if you look on the map. We might not see Tami Island on that little map. So this time, they're meant to see the church there. There's quite a few Christians there. I actually went there myself one year, and I can tell you, it was a very rough ride on a boat. A very small boat. And I was sure glad to get my feet on the ground.

OK, the three Highland Street men, and Jab, and many of his family, plus Ruth and her friend Miring (Miring lives with Ruth) were to go to Tami Island.

All right, I'm going to read you part of Ruth's newsletter.

A week ago I saw the hand of God at work clearer than at any other time. I am left with no other option than to write this report, not to cause anxiety for anyone reading it, but in praise of God's protection and providence. Have you ever been so awed by something that you just don't know what to do with it mentally? I'm there right now. I have no doubt that every aspect of the following story – both good and bad – are the result of prayer and God's plan to bring each of us closer to Him.

So on this boat there was Ruth and Miring, and Jab and a lot of his family, so several kids and you'll hear me mention their names. Plus the three elders from the Highland church of Christ.

At about 7:00am on Friday, July 26th, eleven of us [including those from the Highland church of Christ] set off for Tami Island[.] We were each looking forward to the trip and time with the Christians at Tami. [...] It took around four hours, on calm seas, to get to Malasiga (on the mainland, towards Finschhafen), [...] before heading out for the island. The trip across takes about thirty minutes. When we left the mainland we could see the island, but it didn't take long for that to change. We later learned that the islanders realized a gale was coming up from behind the island, but were late contacting someone on the mainland who would have told us to wait.

As the duration of the trip approached and passed the thirty-minute mark, [we] were anxiously searching for the group of small islands that make up Tami. It was raining heavily, and visibility had got to the point that we couldn't see the mainland either and the sea was getting higher and higher. And then we swamped.

I remember looking down as the water rushed in and saying to [my friend] Miring, "Are we sinking?" Seems like a stupid question now; it was just so unbelievable the time. I will never forget the look on Jab's face as the dinghy went under and all of our possessions started to float out. Among them was the large blue cooler that I had so carefully packed with our lunch [and she had put a lot of stuff in that cooler].

Jab just kept saying, "Stay in the boat, don't leave the boat." Staying in however wasn't an option as it soon flipped. God had been at work in advance however. Jab only recently received this dinghy as a present [His older dinghy would not have survived]. It is one of the latest available and has a built-in flotation device, meaning it wouldn't sink[.]

For a while we congregated around the submerged dinghy, many of us with life-jackets in a half-worn state and some without. Those without had been late in grabbing them and we watched the waves carry the brightly coloured vests away[.]

At times I miss the less complicated times before cell phones. Not that day. Between them, Jab [was] able to reach [his] son Abraham before Jab's phone sunk. At the time we were uncertain that the message had gotten through. I had been wearing my bilum [that's a string bag which I carry sometimes] around my neck and under one arm since Malasiga (I just forgot to take it off!) and Miring was able to reach in and retrieve my phone, but by then it had succumbed, even though it was in a sealed zip lock bag. We just had to wait and pray.

The large strip of plywood that usually sits in the bottom of the dinghy soon floated to the surface and Chanelle was able to use it as a flotation device. As the outboard motor filled with water, it dragged the dinghy into a vertical position, with the bow standing about three feet above the water level (and yes, I did think of the movie Titanic, but not the violins). Becky spent [most] of the time [that's Jab's wife] standing on the propellor while several of us clung to the buoys at the front and the rope that the anchor was attached to. After it was all over, Becky realized that her trousers were torn up and that she had a scratch down one leg. Thankfully she hadn't started bleeding heavily. Those of us at the front of the boat remained unscathed,

however the large blue and grey tarpaulin that had been covering our cargo just wouldn't leave us alone. Each of us spent time getting untangled from it as it drifted around under the dinghy.

You know what I mean by bleeding heavily, right? In the ocean?

Jaslyn, who is in grade four and who is very buoyant without a life vest, was floating off to my right and I had to keep grabbing her and pulling her back to the dinghy so she wouldn't drift off. She was tired and just didn't have it in her to hold on to the rope. I felt the same and put my right hand through the rope loop attached to the buoys. [...] Older sister Jasmine (grade 9) had been seasick before we reached Malasiga and was soon exhausted. We truly feared for her life and Miring and I spent time holding her against the dinghy before Becky was able to swim to us and take her to the plywood. [W]e have all admitted to having a great sense of peace throughout the ordeal.

Eventually all of the Mesa family [...] were congregated around the plywood, while Miring, Randy and I remained with the dinghy. It really was surreal floating there and very timeless. It seems like I had three things that kept me continuously occupied: pulling Randy [that's one of the elders] back to the dinghy each time he started drifting, getting the water out of my nose and throat again each time the bow was hit by a large wave, and keeping my trousers on! [...] Every few minutes I had to reach down and retrieve them again from around my ankles.

I remember looking up while we were floating and seeing a tern fly overhead, [that's a seagull] looking down at us. We actually made eye contact. I didn't think much of it at the time but it is also something that I will always remember. [...] It turns out that that tern, along with a few of its friends, led help to us. They don't usually fly around humans, but they did that day. An answer to our prayers. About three hours after we had gone in, I heard a motor. [...] I couldn't stop yelling "boat, boat, boat". By then, Jab and the rest were quite a distance from us, but I was determined that I'd make them hear above the noise of the waves. Our rescuers were a group of young fishermen who had simply followed the terns to what they thought was a school of fish. They were very shocked when they spotted the bow of our dinghy sticking up and saw the three of us holding on.

We were soon lugged over the side by some very panicked young men[.] Two more dinghies soon followed. They were sent out to look for us. Jab [...] had actually succeeded in getting the message across to Abraham [his son], who had called Jab's cousin, Willie – the village councillor and a fellow believer—who was on the mainland, at Gagidu, with the disaster response team at the time! Another of God's fingerprints.

All eleven of us came out of the ordeal relatively unscathed. [...] We were met by the villagers, as soon as we got to Tami, with dry clothes and lit fires to warm ourselves around. Our sense of deep gratitude has grown even more in the past couple of days upon learning that another dinghy also sunk near us at the same time and that one of its passengers didn't make it.

Remember the terns? God used them to lead help to us, but He also used dolphins. As the boats approached, they realized that there were several dolphins swimming around us continuously. None of us had seen them. [So busy.] We sank in a location that is notorious for sharks. Dolphins are natural enemies of sharks and will chase them away. God used them for our protection. [...] He was taking care of us.

After worship on Sunday morning, [a police boat from Lae came to take us back to the mainland. Jab followed in his dinghy. As] I [...] prayed [...] for his safety[, someone] said, "Wow, look at that!" There was a very large rainbow starting where Malasiga is and ending at Tami Island. We were all awestruck and humbled by His love and care for us.

With love in HIM,

Ruth.

So this is Ruth's newsletter. I want you to encourage you to pray for her, the wonderful work out there. I was there 11.5 years. She was there 30 years. She's really, really good. Let's see in the video now. And if you have any questions afterwards, feel free to ask and I'll try to answer them.

Closing

Certainly one more thing to be thankful for. We are thankful for your presence and participation this morning and for this inspiring story and for the safety and continued good works there. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. And the God of peace will be with you. It is our prayer as we conclude. Thank you.

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