

The
New
Testament
in a Year

Week 11

Acts 27- 1st Thessalonians 3

*This week's reflector is
Lynne Bandy.*

Lynne is the pastor of the Rockwood-
Stone Pastoral Charge.

She is currently enjoying this music on
YouTube - Chris Tomlin's "How Can I
Keep From Singing?" And Nicole
Nordeman's "River God."

Hmmm - must be all that sea imagery
in Acts 27!

Monday

Acts 27

If this chapter were a modern movie, this would be the dramatic 'car chase' scene! Luke describes in lavish detail (and in the first person plural 'we'), the dangerous sea voyage which will bring Paul to Rome and trial before Caesar. There's certainly a swashbuckling quality to the narrative, like other ancient Greek and Roman stories.

Three times Paul tries to intervene and save the ship and its crew and passengers. He witnesses to God when the sailors have given up, and he encourages all to eat a meal that has a 'holy communion' quality. Through all the treacherous weather and the turmoil of suffering and shipwreck, Paul acts as interpreter for God boldly declaring "I have faith in God." (vs. 25)

Think of other Biblical sailors - Noah - Jonah, the disciples.

How goes your own voyage?

Tuesday

Acts 28

Once again Luke describes the roller-coaster nature of Paul's life. It's always the extreme.

Through storm and shipwreck Paul comes to Malta. Hurrah! Then he's bitten by a poisonous viper. Oh no! But he doesn't die! Hurrah! But then he's finally delivered to Rome. On no! It's up or down for Paul - and for us?

But Paul stays faithful to God. He comes to Rome in the prophecy foretold in Acts 19:21 which has been repeatedly underlined - we learn that God wants Paul to give witness in Rome. Rome symbolized the centre of the gentile world with its limitless possibilities for proclamation of the good news of Jesus.

God's salvation extends to all says Luke repeatedly - from Simeon's oracle to John's preaching, to Paul's speech before Agrippa & Festus.

Ah! Now we get it: God's good news is for everyone.

Wednesday

1st Thessalonians 1

Here are the oldest words in the New Testament!

This is Paul's letter to the Christians at Thessalonika, capital city of the province of Macedonia. Thessalonika was a cosmopolitan port city on a major Roman highway, home to a variety of religions.

Re-read Acts 17:1 - 9 for the details of Paul's missionary visit to the city.

Deep connections were forged between Paul, Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy and the Thessalonian believers, and he sends tender greetings to them. He knows they will experience hostility and persecution because of their faith, and he urges them to be steadfast. When he recalls their "work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope" (verse 3) we must remember I Corinthians 13.

We catch echoes of key Christian concepts just below the surface of this letter. Paul's letter, like Luke's account, boldly links the story of Jesus with the story of the early Christian church.

Thursday

1st Thessalonians 2

How do you feel about reading someone else's mail?

I feel a little confused and also awkward – confused, because it's hard to understand the context and awkward because letters are so personal.

So, let's get the context of this letter clear: Paul comes to Thessalonika from a dramatic dangerous encounter at Philippi. News of that event follows him and limits the time he can spend there. He regrets and anguishes over the new believers he has left behind for he knows that this largely gentile community will experience hardship. He says "you know" and "you remember" repeatedly to reinforce their faith, and to encourage them.

It's awkward though because Paul seems defensive and I wonder why – was he accused of having a hidden agenda? or some deceit? Anyway, Paul is no shrinking violet. He explains his mission and urges them to follow his example.

Friday

1st Thessalonians 3

Finally Paul can stand it no longer: he must know how the Thessalonians are doing. So he sends Timothy back there while he travels on to Corinth.

Timothy delivers good news of their faithfulness and love. Paul is thrilled! Timothy reports that though there is persecution, the church is growing. There is however some anxiety in the community about the delayed return of Jesus in glory and power. It prompts Paul to speak of his own longings for reunion with their Christian community 'face to face'.

The Greek word for 'coming' is parousia. "What are we to do while we wait for the parousia of Jesus?" wonder the Thessalonians.

Here's Paul's advice: be loving and embrace holiness.

Is there a message here for your church?