

wanting them to accept their Messiah, hoping they would understand the message God had given him. Large numbers came and he expounded all day. Some believed; some objected. They disagreed among themselves. Before they departed, he reminded them of Isaiah's prophecy and then warned them, "Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen" (v.28).

Are we listening? Or maybe the question should be: what are we listening to? We listen to advertising, to gossip, to television and movie messages about life. Maybe the question is: how are we listening? Are we listening with our hearts? That was Isaiah's concern—that we hear with our ears and understand with our hearts and turn to God to be healed (v.27).

Song of Solomon 1:9—2:7; Psalms 20, 21; Luke 9:37-50

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Sunday, October 9

Psalm 146 *Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever.* (vv.5-6 NRSV)

The heat and the drought and the brisk breeze kept the leaves dropping from the magnolia. I was weary of raking when I spotted a strange little shape in the leaves. It looked like a ball at first. Lifting it revealed an opening on one side. It was so tiny: not more than two by two and a half inches. A nest? The cavity was no more than an inch wide, and an inch and a half deep. It had to be a nest. There were tiny feathers inside—hummingbird feathers!

It was a marvel of engineering; so compact that the gust of wind that ripped it from its limb did not tear it. Yet it was incredibly soft and beautiful. The outside was a mosaic of lichen bits taken from the sweet gum tree.

That nest was a wonderful reminder of the God who made heaven and earth, and set His plan in motion with such amazing precision for the bird and for us, too! "The LORD will reign forever" (v.10).

Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 147; 1 Corinthians 4:9-16; Matthew 15:21-28

Monday, October 10

Acts 26:1-23 *"Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth.... 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.'"* (vv.9, 14)

Paul stands before Festus and Agrippa after being accused of blasphemy by the Jews. He has appealed to Rome and is invited to speak for himself. He admits persecuting the Christians, saying he was "convinced that I ought." He had a great knowledge about the Mosaic Law and about God's dealing with the Hebrews. And he had a great heart for God, but he didn't know God's heart of love.

Paul remembered that Jesus, when Jesus appeared to him, told him lovingly that he was hurting himself against the goads. Goads are spikes used to stop oxen from kicking against the traces as they are being trained to pull loads. And Paul was being trained to pull a vital load to the Gentile world. Convinced finally of Jesus as Lord, Paul did just that. He brought Jesus to us. Are we kicking against the traces? Jesus is always there to lovingly help us understand that his way is the way of joy and fulfillment.

Micah 7:1-7; Psalms 1, 2, 3; Luke 8:26-39

Tuesday, October 11

Acts 26:24—27:8 *When it was decided that we were to sail for Italy, they transferred Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort, named Julius. (v.1)*

Our lives are full of times when our welfare is dependent on other persons: parents, older siblings, teachers, coaches, scout leaders, bus drivers, tour guides in foreign places, advisers on investing in a home, a car, or a business. Sometimes those responsible persons fail to make the best choices for all concerned.

Paul was without choice on his way to trial in Rome. The centurion was in command. Julius was kind to Paul, and even allowed him ashore to visit friends (v.3). He also allowed the boat to sail with unfavorable winds (v.4) and that was risky. It was late October after the Jewish Day of Atonement. September was considered the last safe time for sailing.

We can be certain that Paul was not perplexed. He knew that, come what may, he was in God's hands. We can be that certain, too. We can trust God with our lives and with the lives of those who depend on us. It's just a matter of knowing how much He loves us.

Jonah 1:1-17a; Psalms 5, 6; Luke 8:40-56

Wednesday, October 12

Acts 27:9-26 *But soon a violent wind, called the northeaster, rushed down from Crete. Since the ship was caught and could not be turned head-on into the wind, we gave way to it and were driven. (vv.14-15)*

The first winter our family of seven lived in the country, we woke one winter morning to sounds like rifle shots. The woods seemed to be exploding as pine trees snapped under the weight of frozen rain—in the Deep South! We were not prepared mentally or physically for the loss of power that heated the house, pumped the water, and turned on the lights. We escaped to Grandmama's city home with gas heat.

Paul and his shipmates could not escape the storm, so they gave way to it and were driven. When swimmers in the ocean get caught in an undertow, they are instructed to swim diagonally toward shore and not to struggle against the current. The next time our family experienced a winter storm we had cords of wood for fireplaces and gallons of water under every sink and a camp stove for cooking.

Some storms cannot be faced head on—practical advice from our Heavenly Father's book on life.

Jonah 1:17—2:10; Psalm 119:1-24; Luke 9:1-17

Thursday, October 13

Acts 27:27-44 *"I urge you to take some food, for it will help you survive; for none of you will lose a hair from your heads." After he had said this, he took bread; and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat. (vv.34-35)*

No food had been eaten for fourteen days during the storm. Now they had hope. They had sounded the depths and found the sea floor rising. Land was near. At this point Paul, for all practical purposes, had taken command. He had already advised Julius to stop the midnight attempt of the sailors to abandon ship in the lifeboat. At dawn he gave his shipmates the news that God would spare them all. He strengthened them with food and with his faith. Recognizing the importance of Paul's leadership, the centurion prevented the soldiers from killing the prisoners lest they escape.

And so it was that all escaped to land. Mutiny and murder were averted. God's great plan for the spread of the gospel was intact and on track. Thanks be to God!

Jonah 3:1—4:11; Psalm 18:1-20; Luke 9:18-27

Friday, October 14

Acts 28:1-16 *Paul had gathered a bundle of brushwood and was putting it on the fire, when a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. (vv.3, 5)*

The island of Malta was a friendly place. The derelicts were welcomed and warmed at fires. But even in pleasant places there might be evil lurking—in this case, a viper. Bad things happen to good people: drunk drivers kill children; cigarettes kill fathers; cancer kills mothers; zealots split churches; and a poisonous snake bit Paul. The natives assumed he was a murderer destined to pay for his act. When he did not die, they assumed he was a god. Paul was neither.

When bad things happen to us, God is not punishing us. Christ has already been punished for the worst we can do. Whatever we do we are forgiven if we choose to be forgiven. And there is life after mistakes when we "shake off the creature" and continue in our work and worship. Paul continued in the Lord's work as "the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured" (v.9).

Song of Solomon 1:2-8; Psalms 16, 17; Luke 9:28-36

Saturday, October 15

Acts 28:17-31 *"Go to this people and say, 'You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive.'"* (v.26)

The first people Paul wanted to see in Rome were the Jews. He wanted them to know what had happened to him in Jerusalem. He wanted to tell them that he had not abandoned their God. He spoke to them with love,