

29th January 2012 – Faith's ship

This command I entrust to you, Timothy, *my son*, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight,¹⁹ keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.²⁰ Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, “ 1.Timothy 1:18-20a

Beloved in the Lord,

On the 13th of January, shortly after leaving port, the massive Italian Ocean Liner – The Costa Concordia, was shipwrecked. The massive liner was lying on its side with a hole in its hull. On board the stricken liner were 4,229 passengers and crew. At the time of writing 13 bodies had been found and 20 were still missing.

It is very hard to comprehend how such a tragedy could occur in our modern times. What has come to light is that the ship's captain Francesco Schettino is at fault. He has steered the ship too close to land and hit rocks. In the press the captain is quoted as saying: “I don't know why this happened. I am a victim of my instincts.”

What is clear is that the captain was arrogant and that he has not kept to the prescribed course and has navigated not using charts and instruments, but has relied upon his own cleverness.

With his pride and rash behaviour he has done tremendous damage.

The Apostle Paul writing to his Timothy, uses a sailing ship as an illustration of life in the faith. He warns Timothy to be careful not to make a shipwreck of his faith life. He calls attention to two who have – Hymenaeus and Alexander.

We must understand that it is not easy living life in faith, living in such a way that our life honours God and brings glory to Him. We could compare faith life to life in a war zone. We have an enemy Satan, who is out to wreck our lives at every opportunity. During times of war, many waters were infested with mines, that were hidden, and designed to blow up, on contact.

We could say that living in this world is like trying to navigate a ship through waters that have hidden mines in them. We have to be alert and careful all the time.

Paul encourages Timothy to fight the good fight, and to not give up, but to keep the faith. Herein lies the key – faith. Faith trusts and depends upon God and does not try to go it alone.

Last Sunday we reflected upon Paul's words to the Galatians: ***“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”***
Galatians 2:20

To live in faith is reliance upon God. It is surrendering ourselves to Him. It is living for Him, not ourselves. Faith does not rely upon self knowledge or strength, but obeys God and follows His Word, seeks His will.

If Captain Schettino, had stayed on the right course, the Costa Concordia would not have been shipwrecked. It is as simple as that.

God has given each of us a course by which to navigate through life. It is given to us in the form of His written Word – The Holy Bible. Within the Bible we have all that we need to live life in such a way, that we are blessed, bear fruit for God’s Kingdom and bring glory to His Holy name.

If we ignore the Bible and it’s teachings and think to ourselves, “I don’t need the Bible, I can manage on my own, then sooner or later we will be shipwrecked. The tragedy is that when the shipwreck occurs, it does not only affect us, but usually many others as well. Sin is never isolated. The effects are widespread.

Francesco Schettinos actions not only wrecked a magnificent ocean liner, but sadly ruined many lives and families. Those who perished, were innocent, and their death was the result of one man’s behaviour.

This happens every single day around the world. This is the way the devil operates. Jesus said about the devil: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly.” John 10:10

Latvians have a saying: “Give the devil your little finger and he will take your whole hand.” This is so true. What may begin as a small thing often blows out to be a major thing.

We may never know the full truth behind the Costa Concordia tragedy. What motivated Captain Schettino to steer the ship off course may never be fully known, but we do know that what for him at the time seemed like no big deal, ended in a massive tragedy.

King David was walking around his balcony one evening when he spotted a beautiful woman bathing in a nearby house. He was attracted by her beauty and began to have lustful thoughts. Her beauty quickly enveloped his thoughts and what seemed like a nice thing to do at the time led to major problems. What began with a lustful thought developed into adultery and murder. Chasing after his lusts he gave the devil his little finger and the devil took the whole hand. As a result of affair, David experienced tragedy and unrest in his family throughout all generations. There is no such thing as a small sin.

I mentioned earlier that we live and operate in a mine field. It is possible to navigate safely through without being blown up. We can sail through life without our faith being shipwrecked, but not on our own. We must hand over the captaincy to our Lord Jesus Christ. We have to give Him absolute control. When Jesus ascended after His resurrection He sent the Holy Spirit in His place. The role of the Holy Spirit was to guide Jesus followers in

the Truth. The Holy Spirit is not only the author of the Bible, but He is also given to us as a personal navigator or pilot, if we trust on Him. Not only has he drawn the charts, but He will also navigate and steer our ship if we let Him.

The important thing is to trust Him. Faith trusts Him. Faith says: "Take Thou my hand and lead me o'er life's rough way, With Heavenly manna feed me from day to day. Without Thy grace and favour I go astray. Take Thou my hand my Saviour and choose Thou my way."

Without His leading we go astray, and if we stray we can easily hit a mine, and the destruction will be great.

It is vital that we understand that at the root of all sin is pride. I know better. I don't need God. I will do it my way. I want it so I will do it. !!!!! That is why Paul wrote: ***"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."* Galatians 2:20**

Martin Luther taught that we must daily return to the waters of our baptism, where our old self was drowned, and we were clothed with Christ the Lord.

We should study the chart of God's Word every day. Every day we should pray with the Psalmist: Teach me Your Way O Lord!

***"Teach me good discernment and knowledge, For I believe in Your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word. You are good and do good; Teach me Your statutes."* Psalm 119:66-68** (I encourage you to read the whole of Psalm 119)

If we pray this or something similar from the heart, then God will always obey positively. He will teach us His ways and He will steer us clear of those mines that threaten to destroy us, that seek to shipwreck our faith.

We should not make a single decision without consulting our Heavenly Father. He loves it when we communicate with Him. We should be in fellowship with Him every day in reading, prayer and worship.

Faith trusts and relies upon Him. Faith proclaims that God knows better and simply trusts in Him. When we trust in Him, and His Word, and are led by His Holy Spirit, then we are sailing secure in even the most dangerous waters, because He is at the helm.

Let us fight the good fight of faith and with His blessing may we bear much fruit for His Kingdom to His glory. Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.