

I Love to Tell Sea Stories  
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by Glen A. Busby

Eternal One beyond us,

As we walk along the seashore of Galilee, help us find a path that leads to enlightened wisdom on our pandemic journey. We admit that we are faced with an unknown enemy that has placed a strangle hold on us. Covid-19 has changed the course of our history and our future. So Almighty One, we pray for insight beyond the past wisdom we have followed. May the beauty of your flowers and the new life we see with each new blossom encourage us to revive the coming moments in our lives.

May the refreshed wisdom we seek give us newfound guidance that leads us to safer days with comfort and hope surrounding us. May this wiser guidance deliver us to recovery through the touch of your healing hands. Help the technicolor revelation of Your guidance motivate us to a new spiritual awakening. May the brightness of tomorrow's breaking dawn and the restful peace of Your precious sunsets that follow be guidance for the days to come. For it is with faith in Your amazing grace that we pray. Amen

Psalm 119:105-112 (GNT) – <sup>105</sup>Your word is like a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. <sup>106</sup>I will do what I have promised and obey your fair laws. <sup>107</sup>I have suffered for a long time. Lord, give me life by your word. <sup>108</sup>Lord, accept my willing praise and teach me your laws. <sup>109</sup>My life is always in danger, but I haven't forgotten your teachings. <sup>110</sup>Wicked people have set a trap for me, but I haven't strayed from your orders. <sup>111</sup>I will follow your rules forever, because they make me happy. <sup>112</sup>I will try to do what you demand forever, until the end.

King David sings, writes poetry and prays, "Lord give me life by your word." The Word of God was alive in David's Kingdom. He knew that he had to share God's Word, because I believe he understood the real call of his life. He needed to record for his Kingdom and the Kingdoms to come why he was born, why he had a Kingdom and most of all why God gave him a heavenly talent. As a child, I heard the story about David and Goliath, and later, as an adult I heard about Bathsheba. But I am not sure I have ever heard it stated emphatically that the crown jewels of his Kingdom are the Psalms he wrote. They have become the Old Testament "Living Word of God" in our hearts. As a Navy chaplain and a parish minister I have always read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm at funerals and memorial services because it always gives comfort and peace to the suffering. Think about our military in harm's way and the families surrounding the bed of a dying veteran in our hospital – may they always hear the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm singing in their ears. Amen

How many times in the Gospels did the Pharisees and the Sadducees get between Jesus and His followers sitting beside the sea? More than once they would try to redirect the understanding of a parable from a simple insight to a dilemma with no reasonable answer. A parable is a special story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson like the ones told by Jesus in the Gospels. The "Living Word" in a story translates God's will for each of us.

Psalm 19:14 (adapted from NRSV) – <sup>14</sup>Let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (NKJV) – <sup>1</sup>On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. <sup>2</sup>And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup>Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. <sup>5</sup>Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun was up, they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. <sup>7</sup>And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. <sup>8</sup>But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup>He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (*verses 10-17 will be included in a Bible Study at the end of this sermon*)  
<sup>18</sup>"Therefore hear the parable of the sower: <sup>19</sup>When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. <sup>20</sup>But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup>yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. <sup>22</sup>Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. <sup>23</sup>But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

I love to tell sea stories because I believe it is what Jesus would have me do. Jesus was sitting beside the sea, probably in prayer, when the multitudes started gathering around Him. What better place to have a pulpit than a boat at sea? So, Jesus gets in a boat and starts telling a special type of sea story we call a parable ... <sup>1</sup> "On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. <sup>2</sup> And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup> Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: 'Behold, a sower went out to sow' (Matthew 13:1-3, NKJV) ..."

It was the 13<sup>th</sup> of July in 1986. The ten months preceding had been tragic ones for my family. Our oldest son, Glen, Junior was killed on my birthday, 5 October 1985. This caused us such overwhelming pain and anguish that we will always be in a state of recovery. Then I had to resign from my church after Christmas. The next six months were filled with turmoil, from my denomination failing to stand by us with their promise of support, to selling our house in Georgia and moving home to Florida without a home, church or a job (all the churches in our area had ministers).

Now top it off, that Sunday I locked my keys in my car at the Naval Station at Mayport, Florida. But that's simply setting the scene for God to send down a message. Now let me be clear, before I tell this sea story that what I tell you is not about what I said or what I did, but God at work in our world when we share the "Living Word of God."

Now for the sea story. My younger son, Chad, and some friends from Gainesville, Florida moved all our worldly possessions from Lawrenceville, Georgia on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. We unloaded the U-Haul trucks on the 5<sup>th</sup> and I left for Navy duty at the Mayport Naval Station to serve with the fleet chaplains. As a reservist, a Navy Lieutenant Chaplain, I was guaranteed the least desirable duty for the next weekend. I was assigned the "Divine Worship Service" for three destroyers moored side by side. The plan was to do the services at 0800, 0900 and 1000. I did the first service and fifteen sailors attended. About ten sailors attended the 0900 service. However, I had real competition for the 1000 worship service. "Liberty Call" was announced over the 1MC loudspeaker before "Divine Worship Service!" So, the attendance was small at three sailors. Two of the sailors were feeling sorry for me, because they knew I had already done two worship services. They tried to convince me to read the Scriptures and say a prayer and let that be the service. The third sailor just sat there and never said a word. I remember telling them that even the three of them deserved the same service. It's time to give a "red letter" quote from Jesus of Nazareth, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20, NKJV)." I assured the sailors that they were just as precious to Jesus as all the sailors on the two previous destroyers. After the service, I left to discover my keys locked in my car.

In the summer of 1995, I went to ASU Bahrain (Administrative Support Unit, now called NSA Bahrain - Naval Support Activity) through Central Command. I was scheduled for my first Divine Worship Service before I arrived. "Sunday" services are held on Friday in the Middle East on Navy bases. The Chapel was full with a few empty seats in the back. As a little aside from my story, there is an important footnote – a sea story within a sea story. The Admiral of the Fifth Fleet was a faithful attendee at the worship services. He was in the Country of Jordan the day before, but he took the long helicopter ride home to attend the service. I noticed that his wife would elbow him, when she agreed with something I said. Unlike today when we greet each other elbow to elbow during the pandemic, I suspect she was trying to get his attention. Why include this footnote in my sea story? The authority of a sea story depends upon the integrity of the teller. The Admiral's faithfulness filled a 200-seat chapel. However, there were a few empty seats in the back ...

Sitting on the chancel at the start of the service, I noticed one lone sailor in the back. He was standing against the back wall with his arms crossed like he was either upset or uncomfortable. Even though there were a few empty seats, as the service progressed, he didn't move. At the end of the service I had to stand at the back of the chapel to greet the Admiral, the sailors and their families as they left. The sailor with the crossed arms stood as still as "The Lone Sailor" in the back of the chapel with his arms crossed. After I finished greeting people, I went over to the sailor and introduced myself. I then told him that I was concerned, because he seemed upset or uncomfortable during the entire service. I asked if I could apologize for doing something wrong.

The lone sailor's response was, "Oh no, it was all I could do to keep from running to the front of the chapel to tell everyone to listen to what you had to say. You don't remember me, but I was one of three sailors that was in your service on my destroyer in Mayport. The other two kept trying to get you to cut the service short."

I assured him that I did remember him sitting there silently. Then I told him that after the service, I remembered going out to my car and discovering that I had locked my keys in the car.

Then the lone sailor continued, “What you don’t know was that I was crossing the brow to go kill myself, when I heard the call for Divine Services. I had been in the Navy 12 years and I had no friends and no family. I stopped and told God I would give Him one more chance and I turned around and went down to your service. You didn’t listen to the other two sailors’ request that you shorten the service. Thank God, you were with us for the whole hour. You were willing to share not only that your son had been killed less than a year ago, but how God was helping you recover. I decided that if you could go through what you went through and could still be with us, then I could ask for help. I stayed on the destroyer and God helped me change. That’s why I wanted to go up front and tell everyone to listen to you. Can you wait here?”

He was gone for a short time and came back holding 2 beautiful children in his arms. “These are my children. My wife would have loved to be here, but she had duty. We are both retiring from the Navy next week with over twenty years of service each.”

This is not a story about what I did or what I said. We all need to believe that God sends us as angel messengers to bring the “Living Word of God” to be seen and to be heard by those in need. We are called to be the seed of the sower and when we do what God calls us to do, the seeds will surely fall on good ground.

#### Now for a Bible lesson

There are no spaces between the Greek letters of the earliest existing manuscripts of the New Testament’s Gospels or Epistles. There are also no spaces between words and no punctuation between sentences, aside from an occasionally blank space. Punctuation began to appear in the middle ages. As for verses and chapters, Stephen Langton (c. 1150 – 9 July 1228, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury in England) divided the verses into chapters around A.D. 1227. In 1382, Wycliffe English Bible was first to use the basic chapter pattern, we have today. The Hebrew Scriptures were divided into verses by a Jewish Rabbi, Nathan, in A.D. 1448. I’m sharing this information because the passages we used last week in the July 5<sup>th</sup> sermon “Spirit of America” (Romans 7:1-25a) and today’s Protestant Lectionary (Romans 8:1-11) leave out the second half of the 25<sup>th</sup> verse (25b) and the first 5 verses (if not through the 8<sup>th</sup> verse) of Romans 8 are clearly part of chapter 7. Earlier during these pandemic sermons, I explained the meaning of a pericope (a set of verses that forms one coherent unit or thought). Last Sunday, I used all the verses of Romans 7 (with the exclusion of 25b, even though the Protestant Lectionary only included 15-25a. This is a perfect example of why “proof texting” (taking one or more verses out of their full biblical context) can mislead. Last Sunday, I quoted Matthew 5:38-41 (NRSV) – <sup>38</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ <sup>39</sup>But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ...” What happens if you only quote Matthew 5:38 as your “red letter” quote of the words of Jesus, <sup>38</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’” That is proof texting.

This is Romans 7:25b followed by Romans 8:1-8 (GNT): <sup>25b</sup> So in my mind I am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful self I am a slave to the law of sin. – <sup>1</sup> 8 There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, has set me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> What the Law could not do, because human nature was weak, God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like our sinful nature, to do away with sin. <sup>4</sup> God did this so that the righteous demands of the Law might be fully satisfied in us who live according to the Spirit, and not according to human nature. <sup>5</sup> Those who live as their human nature tells them to, have their minds controlled by what human nature wants. Those who live as the Spirit tells them to, have their minds controlled by what the Spirit wants. <sup>6</sup> To be controlled by human nature results in death; to be controlled by the Spirit results in life and peace. <sup>7</sup> And so people become enemies of God when they are controlled by their human nature; for they do not obey God’s law, and in fact they cannot obey it. <sup>8</sup> Those who obey their human nature cannot please God.

Last Sunday we felt the pain and anguish Paul carried with him through all his missionary years. Paul turned the nightmares and guilt that darkened the shadows of his past into a catalyst to serve God through the victory he received with his union with his savior, Jesus Christ. When studying Scriptures, it is always important to be as inclusive as you can be studying God’s Word. “Proof-texting” is a tunnel-vision way of studying the Scriptures. Like Paul, we may need warning signs to help us survive this horrible pandemic, when we find ourselves struggling with pain and anguish.

Now in this Sunday’s Protestant Lectionary we find the Gospel writer, Matthew, inserting an explanation of why Jesus used parables to teach using a prophecy from Isaiah:

Matthew 13:10-7 (NKJV) – <sup>10</sup> And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”

<sup>11</sup> He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. <sup>12</sup> For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. <sup>13</sup> Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. <sup>14</sup> And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,  
And seeing you will see and not perceive;  
<sup>15</sup> For the hearts of this people have grown dull.  
*Their* ears are hard of hearing,  
And their eyes they have closed,  
Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears,  
Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn,  
So that I should heal them.’

<sup>16</sup> But blessed *are* your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; <sup>17</sup> for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous *men* desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.

The prophecy Matthew is referring to is Isaiah 6:9-10 (GNT) - <sup>9</sup> So he told me to go and give the people this message: “No matter how much you listen, you will not understand. No matter how much you look, you will not know what is happening.” <sup>10</sup> Then he said to me, “Make the minds of these people dull, their ears deaf, and their eyes blind, so that they cannot see or hear or understand. If they did, they might turn to me and be healed.” Matthew wants the readers of his Gospel to know that the listeners should hear with their ears. Matthew wants them to know Jesus is not talking about “corn” (pun intended) seeds. They are to listen for the Word of God. The prophet Isaiah is saying that you are not to turn away from the Word of God, but to turn to the Word of God, so it can ..... heal the cracks in your soul. Paul says the same thing in Romans 8:6b, “to be controlled by the Spirit results in life and peace.” The message to Isaiah’s prophecy, Jesus’s parable, Matthew’s Gospel and Paul’s Epistle to the Romans is to let the Word of God – Word of the Kingdom come alive through your eyes and your ears, so that it will grow in your mind to feed your heart and heal your soul. May this be a Bible lesson worth hearing, so you will learn to share “sea stories” for Christ’s sake. Jesus gives us parables to share and wants us to remember all the miracles He performed. He doesn’t want us keeping them to ourselves. You and I are called to make the miracle stories we read or experience into “sea stories” worth telling.

I love to tell the story

I love to tell the story  
Of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and His glory,  
Of Jesus and His love.  
I love to tell the story,  
Because I know 'tis true;  
It satisfies my longings  
As nothing else can do.

I love to tell the story,  
'Twill be my theme in glory  
To tell the old, old story  
of Jesus and His love.

Lyrics: Katherine Hankey (1834-1911)



The Lone Sailor