



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Evening Worship with Prayer for Healing

Sunday 5th July 2020

Acts 28:1-16

Imagine being a prisoner on board ship for 2 weeks, battered by storms. Food is scarce, things are being thrown off the ship to lighten it, your guards are threatening to kill you. Finally, you jump overboard and swim to the shore. It starts to rain and you are half frozen to death. This is the context of our reading from Acts tonight.

The island St Paul swam ashore to was Malta, and, blessed relief, the locals were unexpectedly kind. They were entertaining angels unawares. They lit a fire for the shivering saints to warm themselves – saints, because quite possibly St Luke was there too. Later, beds for the night were offered, along with provisions. This extract from scripture could be described as the last lap in the incredible book of Acts. It starts with the Ascension of Jesus, and the murderous Saul stoning Christians. It ends with the converted St Paul having travelled around the Mediterranean for 30 years, finishing up where God called him to end his journey – Rome. The last verses of Acts describe St Paul proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with great boldness. What an incredible journey – spiritual, psychological and physical.

If you could sum up Acts you might do so in the words of Matthew 16:18 'I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' Throughout Acts the early church faces every kind of persecution and set back, but it is a book of victory, a book about the dynamism of the Spirit in changing lives, a book about having to get back up after discouragement, and God's sovereign will always prevailing.

What helps this process along the way is the obedience and fortitude of the servants of God and the hospitality shown to them. The combination of all of these things brings healing, wholeness and conversion. Praise God that he has brought us, shivering and disorientated like St Paul, through the worst of the storm. May we too offer and encounter obedience, fortitude, hospitality, conversion and healing.

I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall never prevail against it.