

# McCabe United Methodist Church

The Book of Acts: A Spirit-Fueled Adventure

## ***“The Local People of Malta”***

Sermon on Acts 27:39-28:2, 28:10 (8/27 & 8/28/16)

Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut

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*Let us pray. Holy God, we humbly come before you this morning offering ourselves. May the words of my mouth and the meditations on each of our hearts be holy and acceptable in your sight. You alone are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

Do you know this guy?

He's in his early 20's. He walks into a church sanctuary; it's actually the church where his parents and his little brother go every week. From his perspective they're there too much. And now, here he is; being here is almost too much for him.

Yet here he is. He's slumped down in the pew. He makes sure he's as far away from things as he can be. He doesn't actually know why he's here, yet here he is.

He pulls his cap over his eyes and he settles in for a nap. As he's fading off, he's asking himself: *“Why am I even here? What am I doing? Churches don't care about people like me. Churches only think about their own wants and their own survival.”*

And then there's a tap on his shoulder. Here it comes... He looks up and he sees her. He doesn't know her, but he knows ABOUT people LIKE her. *“She's gonna give him the business,”* he thinks. *“He's probably in HER chair. She's gonna tell him to ‘take off that cap’ and ‘show some respect’. She's gonna tell him, in so many words, that this church isn't for people LIKE HIM...”*

But she didn't tell him to move. She didn't tell him to take off his cap. She put a couple mints in his hand and said “I kinda like this candy. I wondered if you might want some. And OH, it's great to see you this morning!”

Do **YOU** know that lady, or that guy?

Those mints sat on his dresser for a couple weeks before he ate them. And he went back to that church, not every week at first, but as time went on, he went more and more.

It was months later. He was waiting for worship to start. There was a tap on his shoulder. He turned around and smiled. He stuck out his hand for a handshake and the guy tapping him on the shoulder scolded “Take off that hat or get out of here. Don’t you know how to show respect?”.<sup>1</sup>

The Apostle Paul wrote, in Romans 15:7 to: *Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you.*

Welcome one another as Christ welcomes us.

The Apostle Paul knew about welcome and Christian hospitality, didn’t he? The Apostle Paul traveled all over that part of the world. Sometimes he was welcomed and sometimes he was beaten and left for dead.

Pastor Jenny mentioned last week how Paul faced trials for living and sharing his faith... This morning’s Scripture picks up with Paul on his way to Rome. He’s set to stand trial, again, for being a Christian.

Standing trial for being a Christian. Have you ever really thought about that question that gets thrown around? If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would you get convicted? I wrestle with that question: *If I were put on trial for the way I love and share my Christian faith, would there be enough evidence to convict me?*

Back to the Apostle Paul... In this morning’s Scripture he’s on a prison ship. They’re sailing to Rome in treacherous, wintery seas. Our Scripture says it was a brutal trip. Their ship ended up stuck in the sand and getting destroyed by the harsh, crashing waves... The sailors, prisoners and guards, had to jump overboard just to have a chance at survival. It didn’t matter if you could swim or not. The ship was falling apart.

Can you picture it?

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<sup>1</sup> Pastor Melissa Bailey-Kirk. Grace UMC, Springfield MO

Eventually, after swimming and drifting, their feet touch the bottom. These guys climb out of the chilly, churning waves. They're battered and beaten. They're soaked and chilled to the bone. They're dragging themselves out of the water, and the native islanders are standing there ready to meet them...

Our Scripture says: When we [When Luke, from the Gospel of Luke, and the Apostle Paul, and everyone who was with them] came ashore, we learned that the island was called Malta. **The local people were very friendly**, and they welcomed us by building a fire, because it was rainy and cold.<sup>2</sup>

The Maltese people didn't need to welcome the washed up sailors. They could've just as easily driven them back into the sea. They could've let nature run its course, and they could've justified it.

But our Scripture says the Maltese people welcomed the sailors. They cared for the sailors. It was an act of radical, risk-taking hospitality and it likely saved the sailors' lives.

Bishop Robert Schnase writes that **Christian** hospitality is the active desire to invite, to welcome, to receive, and to care for those who are strangers. We offer **Christian** hospitality because of our true desire to help others find a spiritual home.<sup>3</sup>

I wonder if McCabe might be considered a spiritual Malta for our neighborhood and our community? Do insiders AND outsiders see McCabe as a place where all are invited, where all are welcome, and where all can find a spiritual home?

What's the longest distance you've ever swam?

Then, what's the longest distance you've ever swam after not having eaten much? You're dog tired. You're sopping wet and exhausted. You're lost. You're confused. You just survived a shipwreck and the storm is bearing down. It doesn't matter if you're a swimmer or not, you had to jump into

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 28: 1-2 (CEV –Contemporary English Version)

<sup>3</sup> Bishop Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, Abingdon Press, May 2007

the winter waters and try to cling to something just to have a chance to survive the storm.

Finally, your feet touch bottom. You drag yourself up out of the water and in the storm the people from Malta are standing there offering blankets, building a fire, and maybe giving a warm bowl of soup.

It turns out their welcome saves your life now and it impacts you for the rest of your life.

I wonder if people who walk through McCabe's doors... I wonder if McCabe might be considered a spiritual Malta for our neighborhood and our community? Offering Christ and saving lives.

Insiders AND outsiders... do they see McCabe as a place where all are invited and welcomed, where all can find a spiritual home?

Jesus said, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." <sup>4</sup>

Jesus said: Love each other as I have loved you.

When the storms of life hit, we're confronted with how to respond. When the storms of life hit, there's uncertainty, there's unpredictability, and it can get messy. Yet when the storms of life hit, we're confronted with who we are, and what we believe, as followers of Jesus.

And when the storms of life hit others, we have the opportunity. We're given the chance as the church called McCabe to build a warm fire and to care for those who are seeking, who are hurting, and who are lost.

Friends, I've witnessed it right here in the short time we've been here at McCabe. I've seen my brothers and sisters in Christ enter some pretty murky situations and they did it in Jesus' name. I've seen Christian hospitality extended, even when it was uncomfortable and unclear.

Consider someone "washing up on the shores" of McCabe. We don't know them. They don't know our names or where to sit. They might dress in

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<sup>4</sup> John 15:12 (CEB - Common English Bible)

jeans or they might wear a suit. They might have multiple piercings or no piercings at all. They might have polished shoes or they might have flip flops. They might be a banker, or a biker, OR BOTH a banker and a biker.

And it doesn't matter, does it?

Every person who comes through these doors here at McCabe is a beloved and valuable child of God. And every person who came through these doors this morning, including you and me, is more likely to find the life-saving message of Jesus Christ if you and I, like the people of Malta, if WE offer radical hospitality and we do it in Jesus' name...

God has placed us right here in the heart of Bismarck. We have something to offer you can't find anywhere else. We have something to offer that saves lives and changes people forever.

Maybe we might think of McCabe as the island of Malta right here in our neighborhood. We have people all around us and we have people throughout the community trying to survive the storm.

As the church called McCabe, how do we best welcome people in a way that changes lives, and how do we best do it in Jesus' name?

Let's pray:

(Wesley Covenant Prayer)

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;

put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you, or  
laid aside for you,

exalted for you, or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty,

let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and wholeheartedly yield  
all things to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

You are mine and I am yours. So be it.

And the covenant, that holy promise I have now made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition (Contemporary Version), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/what-is-distinctive-about-methodism/a-covenant-with-god>