

4 Pentecost 2021

Oh God, we know that sooner or later, difficult times will come into our lives. Show us that, with your help, we can always do more than we think we can. And give us the strength to trust in you and to always remember how much you love us. Amen.

In Sep 1994, the MS Estonia ferry sank as it was crossing from Tallinn to Stockholm.

According to Wikipedia;

“Of the 989 on board, 138 were rescued, one of whom died later in hospital... The accident claimed 852 lives. Most died by drowning and hypothermia, as the water temperature was 50–52 °F... In total, 94 bodies were recovered: 93 within 33 days of the accident, the last victim was found 18 months later.[15] By the time the rescue helicopters arrived, around a third of those who escaped from the Estonia had died of hypothermia, while fewer than half of those who had managed to leave the ship were eventually rescued.[15] The survivors of the shipwreck were mostly young males with strong constitutions. Seven over 55 years of age survived and there were no survivors under age 12. About 650 people were still inside the ship when it sank. [JAIC 2] The commission estimated that up to 310 passengers reached the outer decks, 160 of whom boarded the life-rafts or lifeboats.[16].”

In an article published in “The Atlantic” by William Langewiesche, he describes the grim scene:

“Survival that night was a very tight race, and savagely simple. People who started early and moved fast had some chance of winning. People who started late or hesitated for any reason had no chance at all. Action paid. Contemplation did not. The mere act of getting dressed was enough to condemn people to death, and although many of those

who escaped to the water succumbed to the cold, most of the ultimate winners endured the ordeal completely naked or in their underwear. The survivors all seem to have grasped the nature of this race, the first stage of which involved getting outside to the Deck 7 promenade without delay. There was no God to turn to for mercy. There was no government to provide order. Civilization was ancient history, Europe a faint and faraway place. Inside the ship, as the heel increased, even the most primitive social organization, the human chain, crumbled apart. Love only slowed people down. A pitiless clock was running. The ocean was completely in control”.

I must refrain from being critical or cynical of the description above. I honestly believe that you had to be there to have that privilege. According to reports, most of the survivors were young and in good physical shape as a lot of climbing was involved. Unfortunately, many had still been partying in the bars as late as 1:00 am. So, when chaos erupted, they were far from clear thinking. And as mentioned delay meant death.

One of the more positive outcomes was widely shared in the media. Laurinda Keys published a story on October 1, 1994.

“STOCKHOLM, Sweden (AP) _ With the Estonia rapidly sinking, Kent Harstedt and Sara Hedrenius promised to have dinner together if they survived. Then they hurled themselves over the railing and into the frigid waters of the Baltic.

“When we realized that the ship was going down, we held hands and walked into the sea, ” Hedrenius, 20, said Friday on Swedish state television. “The last thing Kent said was, ‘If we survive this, I’ll treat you to dinner in Stockholm.’

"We lost each other in the water, and I thought I was going to drown. When I came up to the surface, I saw a head to the left of me. I asked who it was, and it was Kent," she said, her blue eyes shining happily.

Harstedt, meanwhile, had been sure he was going to die. In the water, his foot became entangled in wire, and he was pulled under. "There was water in my mouth and nose," he said Thursday in a television interview. "I thought of my family ... and I said, 'Goodbye.'

"I blacked out. The next thing I remember, my foot came loose, and I came to the surface."

The Swedish pair found a life raft amid the chaos early Wednesday and struggled aboard.

"We decided to remain calm. The icy waves came down over us," Harstedt, 29, was quoted by Swedish newspapers as saying.

"In the raft, we sat with water up to the chest and hugged each other to keep warm," said Hedrenius. "Icy waves came over us all the time and 10 others in the raft froze to death."

In a disaster, why do some survive, and others do not? The word "crisis" comes from Latin, and before that, Greek. Its original meaning is "decision". In a crisis, events happen fast and furious. The tendency to hunker down in place can be strong; hoping that the surrounding chaos is temporary or may just resolve itself. But, if it is a genuine crisis, that's impossible. There were many couples on the Estonia who consciously decided to stay together knowing that one or the other, or both, simply could not pull

themselves out. Even knowing that death was certain. Others simply froze and could not process what was happening or how to act. When you watch rescue movies, the hero survives and rescues as many others as possible. But most of the time, the hero is a martial arts expert, a Navy Seal, Green Beret, or Special Forces. They were able to do what they did because of their experience, training, and a good movie plot. The point being, those with training react from instinct and muscle memory. Just watch 'The Karate Kid' and revisit the 'wax on, wax off' method. How many on a cruise ship actually listen to the safety presentations by the crew or take the time to know where the lifeboats and life preservers are located nearest to their cabin or other popular locations on the ship? Hopefully, you would never need to use these, but I am sure that those on the Estonia thought the same thing.

The old adage of practice made perfect applies in so many areas of life but never as much as it does in a crisis.

Saul and the Israelites found themselves facing a crisis. They were in a panic mode and inactive with fear. Goliath must have been a fearsome opponent.

Goliath's height was listed as "six cubits and one span." Taking a cubit to be approximately eighteen inches and a span to equal six, this figures to a height of approximately nine feet, six inches. Other sources list him at 4 cubits and a span. Either way he was big.

No one wanted to go out and face him. No one except David. Now David is a picture of calm. He basically says to Saul; "What is all the fuss about? I will go fight him". David's confidence was twofold. Goliath had defiled the name of God and God was with David in battle. David also had confidence in his use of his sling because he had killed both lion and bear with it. He had used it many times and was good at it. Practice made perfect.

The disciples were professional fisherman and had years of experience. They had been on the lake many, many times and certainly were no strangers to storms that would arise. Yet, based upon the wording in Mark, it appears that they feared this particular storm to the point that they were perturbed that Jesus was sleeping despite the waves crashing in on the boat. Like the Israelites, they had temporarily lost sight of their faith in God's protection.

Jesus had absolute confidence in who he was, and that God was with him. Therefore, he acted with calmness and confidence.

There are many stories that have been written about the Estonia and other tragic events. None of us believe that those who perished on that ferry did not believe in God or have a deep faith life. We are painfully aware that bad things happen to Christians as well as non-believers and vice versa. Evil happens and it is simply a reality that we face bad things over which we have no control. But we, as Christians, do not need to live in constant fear and worry either. Over the past year, over 600,000 people in this country died of COVID. We know that this, in no way, reflects the faith-life of any who died or of their loved ones.

What can we do when we are staring down a 'Goliath event' in our lives, when the waves are crashing down upon us, and we are sinking?

David clearly trusts God. He's aware God has chosen him as the anointed king. It is a promise he can rely on. He also knows — and says several times to King Saul — that he is all about **God's glory**, not his own. David knows he is merely an actor in a much greater drama. He is not the director of that play. God is.

Obviously, we do not know Jesus' state of mind and thought process while in the boat. But we do know that he trusts God, implicitly. Jesus seems surprisingly unconcerned about the facts of their predicament. He knows God is in control, one way or the other.

David had spent many days practicing his sling work while he tended the sheep. Jesus spent a lot of time in prayer to God. It was second nature to him.

Prayer — especially silent, contemplative prayer takes quite a bit of effort. At least it does for me. Regular prayer is a sort of spiritual agility training. Like David — alone in the hills looking for smooth stones, placing them into his sling, and practicing sending them sailing off, one after another — cultivating a regular prayer life is a way of developing a spiritual tool that is adaptable to all sorts of crisis situations.

It is not a matter of if, crisis or tragedy will come into our lives, but how we will handle it. The trick is not to wait for it to come crashing down upon us. If we get in the habit now — when times are good — of entering into regular conversation with the Lord, we will find that the channel is available even more easily in the hour of our greatest need.

Practice does make perfect.

Amen!