

**McCabe United Methodist Church**  
**Pastor Ray Baker**  
**July 3 & 4, 2010**  
**“Godspeed”**

**Isaiah 43:1-7**

On this my first Sunday I have been encouraged to select a sermon that I'm very comfortable with to help me lesson the stress of this being my first sermon at McCabe. So, I selected a sermon that is about something I love doing: sailing.

About three years ago my best friend and my brother-in-law talked me into taking up the sport/hobby of sailing. I was a little apprehensive about this adventure, but we did so with the goal of renting a catamaran, with four cabins, in the Caribbean and sailing for ten days.

The thing I loved about our lessons was the feeling of instant success. When we put up the mainsail and shut off the engine...we continued to glide across the water. Now, I won't tell you we're experts; we're more like a group of teenagers with a learner's permit. But we do have lots of fun.

As we celebrate this 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday we often think about the birth of our nation in 1776, but the presence of English colonists goes all the way back to 1607 when the first permanent English colonists arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, beating the Pilgrims to the New World by 13 years.

One of the three ships that brought the colonists to Jamestown was named *Godspeed*, a three-masted square-rigger that sailed the Atlantic for nearly five months to get to Virginia. The ship was just 88 feet long — about the length of a double tractor-trailer — and had a top speed of about 4 miles per hour. The colonists endured what we would consider to be intolerable conditions, with 13 crew members working on the deck and 39 passengers stuck in the cargo hold with 40 tons of supplies.

Imagine yourself on board the *Godspeed*, pulling out of London on a cold winter day, December 20, 1606. You cruise down the Thames River without any problems, but then hit the English Channel, which is being raked by stiff winds from the ocean. It takes you six full weeks of sailing to clear the channel.

Today, we can fly to London in just six hours. Four centuries ago, it took six weeks to make it down the channel and out to the open seas.

Then you cross the Bay of Biscay and turn south toward the Canary Islands. There

you replenish your water supply, and catch the strong trade winds which push you across the Atlantic Ocean.

The weeks pass slowly, with nothing to look at, nothing to do. Boredom takes over. Food rots. Tempers flare. People stink.

Finally, you sail into the Caribbean. The island of Dominica becomes your first landing site, and from there you hop to the Virgin Islands, where you do some hunting and fishing. According to the records of John Smith, the most famous passenger aboard the ship, you feast every day on iguanas, tortoises and pelicans, as well as “Parrots and Fishes.”

Personally, I will pass on that menu.

You sail north in search of Virginia, but find that your destination is not so easy to reach. Although your calculations indicate you should be there, you search for three days, but see no land. Then a violent storm strikes your ship, and you have to drop sail and ride it out. There is no way to steer the ship in such conditions, and you fear being blown onto the sand bars of North Carolina’s Outer Banks. There, all crew and passengers would be washed into the sea and drowned.

But God is with you, and you are driven by the wind into the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. On April 26, 1607, you make landfall at Cape Henry, and then on May 14 you finally reach your destination — Jamestown.

You have been delivered by *Godspeed*, a ship whose name means “May God cause you to succeed.”

That’s a good name to keep in mind as we begin a new year filled with both hope and uncertainty.

Today’s passage from Isaiah 43 contains a promise from God: **“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you”** (Isaiah 43:1-2). This is the kind of promise that the crew of *Godspeed* must have lived by, especially as violent winds howled around them and towering waves crashed over the deck of their ship. **“Do not fear,”** says the God of earth, wind, water and fire; **“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.”**

There are few things more terrifying than the watery chaos of the sea, especially to colonists on an 88-foot sailing ship, and to the people of Israel who first heard this promise from the prophet Isaiah.

Water. It's a fierce and fear-inspiring force. If you've been watching the news this week you've learned about a 16 year old girl who tried to circumnavigate the globe, but her boat was demasted in a violent storm.

In the face of such danger, God reaches out to us with the assurance, **“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you”** (v. 2). When you move through the thing that scares you the most — **“I will be with you.”** When you struggle through job loss, academic failure, personal betrayal, disease, depression or divorce — **“they shall not overwhelm you.”** God promises to give us help and protection and peace, in the face of the worst terrors and trials that life can throw at us. As we are being hit with the most daunting of personal challenges, the ONE who formed us promises to preserve us.

The question for us is this: Are we living a “Godspeed life”? Is it a life in which we really believe that God will help us to succeed? A life in which we are convinced the Lord who created us is going to care for us? The colonists on the little square-rigger *Godspeed* believed this to be true, and they were able to reach their destination.

How about us? Right here. Right now. In the year 2010. Do we believe in Godspeed living?

It's pretty clear the word “Godspeed” has nothing to do with velocity — the colonists' ship topped out at a blistering 4 miles per hour. It's the speed of a brisk walk. In this case, speed comes from the Middle English word “spede,” which means “prosper.” So to wish someone Godspeed is to wish that God will help them to prosper, or cause them to succeed.

It's an antiquated term, very Old School, one you would never hear uttered on TV, talk radio, and it isn't used on facebook or twitter. But even though we might not use the word, we can learn from it.

Godspeed living is a life in which we trust God — **really rely on God** — to give us success and good fortune.

NOW, don't be confused! This is no trifling prosperity gospel, in which faith in God is said to translate into showers of material riches. NO, Godspeed living is about a different brand of success and good fortune.

After all, the Israelites were never given an easy life — they still had to pass through the trials of waters, rivers, fire and flame. Their wealth was found in the

promise of God, **“Do not fear, for I am with you”** (v. 5). And the residents of Israel today are not particularly rich in a worldly sense. For example, they sit on the only sliver of land in the Middle East that has never produced a barrel of oil.

So, how does one recognize the signs of Godspeed living? The success and good fortune of Godspeed living are far more spiritual than material. It always has been and it always will be that way.

We know Godspeed living when:

- We hear God, say, “You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you” (v. 4);

- We realize we’re part of a **compassionate community of faith**, one that God is constantly forming and reforming when he promises, *“I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you”* (v. 5);

- We discover that we’re nothing less than children of Almighty God — *“whom I created for my glory,”* says the LORD, *“whom I formed and made”* (v. 7).

It is a good idea to ask ourselves, the people of God, whether we are in calm or troubled waters right now. Calm water is often a relief and can be a respite from the storm. But take it from someone who has sat in a sailboat for an hour and a half without being able to get back to the dock. **You can’t get too far sailing in calm water.** It’s only when we **“pass through the waters,”** when we encounter the rough water, that we can know anything about the meaning of “Godspeed.”

This is Godspeed living — a focus on being God’s people, in the face of any obstacle, any failure, any betrayal or any challenge that is before us. If we keep our eyes on the Lord, God will give us success. If we rely on his care for us, he will offer us good fortune.

**This is our success. This is our good fortune. We are precious, honored and loved. Part of a community of faith. Created for God’s glory. Formed and made by a loving Lord.**

(The source material was provided by Homiletics magazine July, 2007; used with permission and revised by Ray Baker.)