Ash Wednesday

Jesus & Geometry?!

My high school geometry teacher was an eccentric old gent who had us all imagining that his classroom was a huge sailing vessel. As we entered through the doorway on the first day of class, he greeted us with a hearty “Welcome aboard,” and then bid us, one by one, to sit on either the port or the starboard side of the room. He was, he reminded us, at the helm of our ship (the chalkboard). Ne’er-do-wells and rogues were sent either to the poop deck (the back of class) or the brig (the principal’s office). The rest of us? Well, we were the crew, of course, working together to batter down the hatches and swab the deck. “We are,” Mr. Otterstein announced (that was his name, Mr. Otterstein), “on a geometric journey.”

Thursday

The Crew’s Contract

So ... are you up for the journey? Not through geometry. I would hardly be able to captain that vessel. Math’s not really my thing. No ... this is a journey through the treacherous shoals of Lent. Are you ready to join the crew of this here Lenten ship? There’ll be no disembarking ... no abandoning ship. Nope, Matey ... if you sign on, you’ll need to stay on until journey’s end. If you’re willing, make your mark below:

Sure ... I’ll make my mark: _________________________

(May God guide our journey!)
Friday

Back To Capt. Otterstein

Of all the phrases that Mr. Otterstein used on our long and arduous “geometric journey,” one sticks in my mind as being especially comforting. “Safe Passage,” he would say. “Safe Passage.” Now, I know what “Safe Passage” means as well as you do. “Safe Passage” means that the boat isn’t going to sink or get attacked or incur any other sort of tragedy. But when Mr. Otterstein said it, it meant something different entirely. Because, after all, we weren’t really on a boat. Theorems weren’t really interesting ports of call. Tardy students weren’t really pirates. We were in a classroom. And we were studying a subject that none of us truly understood when we first boarded that big old boat. We were students who had to pass a difficult class. And “Safe Passage” was Mr. Otterstein’s way of reminding us that nobody in that class was going to drown. We were in this together. And he was going to make sure that we would all pass. “Safe Passage” meant that we were all going to make it through this. And, since he was the one handing out the grades, coming from him, “Safe Passage” was pretty reassuring.

Saturday

Feeling Safe?

When have you felt safe? Even in treacherous, dangerous situations? Are there people (or one person in particular) whom you associate with safety? Maybe a parent ... a large friend ... a wise friend ... a coach or
other person in authority ... a soldier ... a police officer ... a pastor ... a teacher ... an older sibling?

Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Here are words of comfort for dangerous voyages:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. —Psalm 23

Trolling the shoals of the valley of the shadow of death? Sitting in the presence of enemies? Fearing no evil with my Shepherd around? Sounds like “Safe Passage” to me!

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

A SAFE PASSAGE PRAYER

Can you recite the entire 23rd Psalm? Take the time to memorize it today. Use it over the coming weeks as your daily Lenten prayer.

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever! —Psalm 23

Can you write a version of Psalm 23 in your own words?
I’m coming to a point. (And since we’re more than a week and a half into Lent, I suppose it’s about time!)

When Jesus turned toward Jerusalem, he announced to his disciples that “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and be killed ...” (Luke 9:22). Rough waters? That sounds like a regular hurricane! Rejection? Murder? Up until this point it had been pretty smooth sailing for Jesus and the disciples—healings, crowds, miracles, fame.

But when Jesus announced that they were heading for Jerusalem and that things were going to get sticky ... well ... if I were in the disciples’ shoes, I would have started wondering where Jesus was planning on steering us!

Hold it! I just realized something awful!

I suppose I really AM in the disciples’ shoes! We all are. On this, our Lenten journey, we are all sailing along to Jerusalem, where the waters will get choppy, and then stormy, and then downright deadly. This is turning out to be no simple pleasure cruise. This boat is destined to sink! And all hands are going down with the ship!

Help! Glug ... glug ... glug ...
Wait! Don’t abandon hope!

I failed to finish Jesus’ thought, set forth there in the ninth chapter of Mark’s Gospel. “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed ... and on the third day BE RAISED TO LIFE!” (Luke 9:22).

“SAFE PASSAGE!” Jesus cried to those disciples that day (and to us as well). “SAFE PASSAGE!” Sure, the ship may get batted around, and we may get bloodied up a bit—a nail hole here and there, and perhaps the scar left by a spear—but “this is the Captain speaking, and I am promising you a SAFE PASSAGE! We’ll make it through all of this. And we’re going to end up in the most beautiful harbor you’ve ever seen!”

Now, it may be necessary for me to remind you who is making all of these promises, just in case you forgot. Our Captain on this trip is Jesus Christ—the Son of God and the Ruler of the universe—who sits, even as we speak, in glorious, heavenly splendor. He’s also the judge who will one day return and put all things under his feet. And since he’s the one handing out the grades, coming from him, “SAFE PASSAGE” may be the most wonderful phrase any of us will ever hear!
Easter Sunday

Alleluia! Safe Passage!

He made it! Jesus made it! He made it through that awful trial. He made it through the mockery and the pain. He made it all the way through death, carrying the weight of the world’s sin (your sin ... and mine, too) on his shoulders. And he made it out the other side.

Jesus’ resurrection from the dead proves, once and for all, that God is gracious, forgiving, and abounding in love! God doesn’t want death for his children. Want proof? Well, there he is! One of God’s children, verified dead (the spear mark proves it), was buried in a sealed tomb. And he’s walking around and feeling fine, thank you very much!

Jesus, you just defeated the power of sin, death and the devil! What are you going to do now?

“Why, I’m going to lead the way for every child of God—through life’s rough seas, through death’s doors, and on to life everlasting!”

SAFE PASSAGE! He made it! He’s calling us through the storm of life and the darkness of death. He’s calling us from the other side. He’s beckoning us to follow. And he’s making a promise about the journey ... “SAFE PASSAGE!”