THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

Text: Job 12: 1-12

One of the most unusual characters I have ever known was Pop Stauning. Pop was an old Norwegian fisherman who, with his precious wife, retired to Florida and was a member of the church where my father pastored. Pop and I became fast friends during my teen-age years. I became acquainted with him not long after we had studied Ernest Hemmingway's "The Old Man and the Sea" in school. Pop became my real life personification of the old weathered protagonist. Some of the most precious memories of my teen years were spent in the company of this old fisherman. I see now the wisdom of my parents during my tendency to rebel against authority; they often sent me to Pop. As soon as you walked into this man's presence, you were in another world and in another time. He leaned slightly to one side, yet still maintained a good height. He had a short white beard and wore an old seaman's hat with which he was inseparable; the one exception was when he was in church. He had a fantastic boat that he made by his own hands. He installed the engine himself. Even now in my memory I see him at the stern. The farther out to sea we went, the more animated and talkative he became. I hear him now in his broken English and strong Norwegian accent. I learned so much from this old man. I learned to respect the water. He studied it as well as any doctor would study Grey's Anatomy. I learned to love the simple pleasures of nature. There is hardly any sky to compare with the sky at sea. One valuable lesson was learned while we were walking along the shore of Captain Johnny's Island. (You may think I have added this to our story to make it more interesting, but I have not.) One day when Pop and I were out setting trotlines, we took an excursion to a little island off Florida's west coast. I asked him as we began to go ashore, "Pop, what's the name of this island?" He replied, "It doesn't have one, but as of today, it is Captain Johnny's Island." Don't look for it on any map and I could not even take you there if you set me down in Tampa Bay, but it is forever sketched in my memory. While we were walking along the shore of this small island, I kicked an empty crab shell. He grabbed me by the arm and said, "Never do that!" I asked, "Why? The crab is gone; that's just his empty shell." He answered, "Ya, but 'dere was life

‘dere once and you must always remember to respect life!” I have never forgotten that lesson.

One day when I returned home from school, Mom said, “We’ve got to pray; Pop went out fishing last night and he hasn’t come in.” It became even more intense when the Coast Guard was called out and they went in search of him. They found him stranded on a sand bar. He was not worried. He miscalculated his time to come home and got stranded. He was not worried and wondered why everybody made such a fuss, because he was just waiting for the tide as he had done all his life. He knew that when the tide would come in he could navigate home. Assuredly, cell phones would have been a blessing back then. I visualize Pop on his homemade boat, a fresh catch on ice, singing a hymn and just waiting for the tide to come in. I learned three additional lessons from Pop. Let’s talk about it:

1. Ride with the tide.

This was not Pop Stauning’s first time to get stranded between the tides. He was an old fisherman; of all people he should have known the tides are surer than Greenwich Mean Time. But he would get so preoccupied that he would fail to look at his clock. Not long ago I observed the Galveston Bay and the Houston Ship Channel was at high tide at 9:52 AM and 5:15 PM. Just because a fisherman believes he can land one more tuna, one more grouper, or that coveted swordfish that’s eluded him for far too many fishing trips, doesn’t mean that God is going to override the entire sidereal systems of the universe and change the time of the tides for your catch of the day.

It is true--God is able to stop the course of the movement of heavenly bodies to fulfill His purpose, such as in the case of Joshua. Joshua 10:13 and 14 says, “And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel.” God’s Word says there was never a day like this before or since. This was the exception because Joshua was fighting the Lord’s battles. When we are doing God’s perfect will, He will move heaven and earth to accomplish His purposes with and through us. God says, “For I am the LORD, I change not...” (Malachi 3:6). Therefore, if our purposes

are in perfect sync with Him we can expect miracles. On the other hand, it is presumptuous to set yourself up for an interruption of nature to satisfy your schedule or lack of one.

2. God has the ability to override the tide.

When the wicked kings of the Amorites assembled themselves against Gibeon, God declared: “And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee” (Joshua 10:8). Faith is taking God at His Word. If God said He was going to deliver the enemy into Joshua’s hand, you can count on it!

A great storm broke out over the Sea of Galilee when Jesus and His disciples were crossing over. Jesus was sleeping peacefully in the ship when the anxious disciples, convinced they were going to perish, woke Him up. Jesus arose and spoke the words, “...peace, be still...” (Mark 4:39). Then Jesus asked, “...Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?” (Mark 4:40). Have you ever wondered why Jesus asked this question? It is understandable that the natural impulse would be to worry at a time like this. Here is the reason the disciples had no need to fear or worry: because Jesus said just before they crossed, “...Let us pass over unto the other side” (Mark 4:35). If Jesus said they were going to cross to the other side, they should have been aware that no matter how rough the storm, no matter how high the waves, no matter how hard the wind blows, they were going to make it to the other side, according to His Word.

3. Wait on the tide.

When soldiers begin a mission, they will all check their watches to make certain they will all arrive to their destination at the same time. When we set our time to God’s time, we arrive to His destination at the right time.

Even though the United States Coast Guard did not know where Pop Stauning was, he knew where he was and he knew what to do, which was, to wait. The tide was coming in. The tide was more sure than the traffic on Wall Street.

During World War II when German forces were retreating from North Africa, they attempted to make the port unusable at Eritrea. They did this by filling barges with concrete and then sinking them across the harbor. The Allies took some empty refinery- sized gasoline tanks, sealed them and floated them across the harbor just

above the concrete-filled barges. Then they chained them to the barges at low tide. The high tide pulled the tanks and the tanks pulled the concrete barges from the sucking mud at the bottom of the bay, thus removing the obstruction into the bay. Shakespeare acknowledges this power of the tides in the 4th act of Julius Caesar. He puts these words upon the lips of Brutus, who is trying to persuade Cassius to assist him. He says, “There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in misery. We must take the current when it serves, or lose our venture.” Lamentations 3: 25, 26 reads, “The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.” If you wait on God, you will be ready for the opportunities He sends your way! He loves you.

Conclusion:

Ecclesiastes 9:14-18. We close with a beautiful story told by a wise man about another wise man who saved a city. Pop Stauning was not a rich man with the world’s goods, but he was a wise old man with a saving message.

-Johnny Pope-