

Chaplain John Connolly  
[1<sup>st</sup> reading: Daniel 9:4-19]  
[Psalm: Psalm 25:1-9]  
[2<sup>nd</sup> reading: 2 Corinthians 12:2-10]  
[Gospel: Luke 22:39-46]  
[Liturgical date: Pentecost 6C]  
[Location: USNA]

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You know, there is a certain timelessness that exists when you are upon the sea. Standing upon the deck of a ship you feel the gentle roll of the ocean from side to side, and then she will pick you up in her swells and gently set you down again. Stepping onto the bridge wing of the ship you enjoy that misty salty air as the breezes from the ocean gently kiss your face, late in quiet evening air. As you enjoy that moment you could easily be standing on the deck of the USS ESSEX, commanded by Captain David Porter, in 1813, and sailing against the British in the War of 1812. Or, you could be standing on the deck of the USS ESSEX, commanded by Captain Joker Jenkins, in 2013, and sailing for the cause of peace and freedom in modern day. At a certain point with the gentle rolling of the sea and with the misty salty air, you just simply cannot tell. It is at that moment that you become one with the sea, and that is a place of timeless peace.

My previous command, prior to coming to the Naval Academy was the USS HARPERS FERRY and the USS GERMANTOWN. Every evening while the ship was at sea I would make my way to the bridge about 15 or 20 minutes before taps; this was one of my favorite times of the day. I would step onto the bridge that was all dark, and I was surrounded by watch standers all around the bridge, busy about their appointed tasks. The Officer Of the Deck was entrusted with safely navigating the ship through the night, and overseeing pretty much every operation on behalf of the commanding officer. This is a job that many of you will have in not that many years. As I would look around the bridge I would often notice our commanding officer, sitting quietly in his captain's chair on the bridge. From there he would observe and take in all the various evolutions that were going on. He was keeping an eye on our heading and any potential hazards that may befall us. Then I would hear him, gently encourage our Officer Of the Deck, "Keep her true Mr. Beautyman, Keep her true."

My Commanding Officer was Commander Tony Hull, and as far as I am concerned, a man wise well beyond his years. He was able to quickly and easily read the ocean and the ship, and recognize the impact of set and drift on a ship.

You see, the sea, she is alive and will pull a ship in ways that she does not wish to go. Drifting with the speed of the sea on a set course other than what you intend. A skilled Officer Of the Deck is easily able to compensate for the impacts of set and drift and keep a ship on it intended and true

course despite any impacts of set and drift. So, the Captain would encourage him, "Keep her true Mr. Beautyman, Keep her true."

A five minutes before taps, the Boatswains Mate of the Watch would pick up the microphone for the 1MC, or the ship's announcing system, and give a quick call on his pipe then announce, "Tattoo, tattoo, lights out in five minutes. Stand by for the evening prayer." Then he would turn and hand the microphone to me. Just as the Captain had encouraged the Officer Of the Deck, it was now my turn and I would pray, with my crew asking God, in essence on behalf of myself and my crew, "Keep Me true, Keep Me true."

Today we continue our exploration of the Midshipman's Prayer as we look deeper into the second petition, "Keep me true to my best self, guarding me against dishonesty in purpose and in deed, and helping me so to live that I can stand unashamed and unafraid before my shipmates, my loved ones, and thee."

In our gospel reading today Jesus was speaking to his disciples and praying in the Garden of Gethsemane near the time of his arrest, subsequent trial, and eventual crucifixion. The disciples were obviously failing to keep true and continued to fall asleep on watch, so Jesus encouraged them, "Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial." In many ways this is Jesus' version of, "Keep her true Mr. Beautyman, Keep her true."

For the disciples, and for us today, either of these prayers are very humbling. Praying to not come into the "time of trial" or "guarding me against dishonesty in purpose and in deed," requires of us the recognition that I am weak and that I need help. Just as any ship is subject to the set and drift of the sea I, no we / all of us, are subject to the set and drift of the "time of trial" as Jesus warned his disciples, or "dishonesty in purpose and in deed," as we pray in the Midshipman's prayer. Often these are even better said as temptation to sin.

The reality of the drift of temptation is that it is crazy strong, and the set of temptation can be quite deceiving. It all seems like we are doing what we ought to be doing, and that we are on the right course and the way that we wish to go, but we do not realize exactly how far off course we have veered for quite some time. In our prayer, however, we recognize that the set and drift of temptation can and will lead us off course, AND, it is very strong. So we pray, even more earnestly, "Keep me true."

In the coming weeks for each of us, whether that is the Class of 2017 or the link in the chain, Class of 1967, or any of us gathered here, I want to encourage us all to take a good hard look at the course we wish to sail, the course that God calls us to. For me, Joshua said this best for what our

course should be, “as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> This is my course; what is yours?

An Officer Of the Deck who is truly naïve could possibly begin to think that the set and the drift of the sea will not impact him. This is not someone who I would refer to as a truly wise officer, because by thinking this that officer will certainly be standing tall in front of the Commanding Officer both, “ashamed and afraid,” as he is explaining to the Captain exactly why the ship was so far off course. This officer’s course will never stay true. But, an Officer Of the Deck who takes into account the impact of set and drift will easily stay on course.

Our set and our drift is temptation, drawings us deeper into sin. We compensate for this set and drift through our devotion life, through times of worship, through the Christian accountability of Godly brothers and sisters in Christ walking faithfully with us, and especially through prayer. So we pray, “Keep me true,” and God helps us to steer a straight course, serving the Lord. God helps answer the prayer that Christ gave us, to “save us from the time of trial.” And, through that, God helps us to navigate around the temptations of life.

Crashing on the rocks, in a ship or in life, makes it very hard to stand unashamed or unafraid before anyone; especially if all we ever had to do was to ask for help. So, be humble, and ask for help. Ask for help in the big things of life and the small; God will provide. God wants to provide and he gave us the gift of prayer to not only praise and adore him, but to also reach to him in those moments we need him most.

God never has, and God never will force his way into our lives. God has given us the freedom to completely and totally reject his love, to reject his help, to reject his forgiveness, to reject his redemption, to even reject the life that he has blessed us with. OR, he has also given us the complete and total freedom to accept all of this and more through the simple gift of prayer.

Do you know what makes being at sea so enjoyable – NOT crashing on the rocks. You see, crashing on the rocks seems to just suck all the joy out of being at sea. When Mike Beautyman was standing Officer Of the Deck he genuinely listened to our Captain, he regularly checked with combat to ensure that other ships and aircraft were not in the way, he regularly checked with the quartermasters to ensure that we were staying on course, he regularly check on the lookouts, etc. It was then, and only then that he was able to not crash our ship on the rocks and accomplish what the Captain told him to do, “Keep her true Mr. Beautyman, Keep her true.” Mike knows that he cannot do all this alone, and he does not try.

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua 24:15

So, why should we? Why should we ever try to keep true all alone? Life is much better not crashing on the rocks. So, “Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial,” and pray, “Keep me true.” Don’t ignore the power of temptation, it is too strong. Pray, that we may avoid it. Then, you get to enjoy the timelessness of the sea and the timelessness of being in our Lord’s presence, the life that God gives you, where you belong. Where we can stand, unashamed and unafraid, before all – especially God.

Discussion Questions:

1. Onboard ship we have the ship’s compass and other instruments to help “keep us true,” and on our intended course. From a faith perspective, what do we have to help “keep us true,” in scripture? In the Christian community? In our family?
2. When you consider the “set and drift” of temptation, what have you found to be the most deceiving; that temptation that you think you are going the right way only to discover you are off course? And, what part does peer pressure have in hiding the truth of your wrong course from you?
3. Consider the times in your life when you struggled against temptation, how did you experience God helping you to navigate those treacherous waters? At what point did you begin to feel God help you?
4. Consider the humbling part of admitting you are weak and need help to stay true. Is that humility worse than the humility of “crashing on the rocks” because you did not stay true? What does it take to finally admit you need help?
5. How has God enabled you to help keep others true? Who has God brought into your life to help keep you true?