

Coach House Church BEACONS

R E S C U E D

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Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn't, and doesn't, wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we were far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready. And even if we hadn't been so weak, we wouldn't have known what to do anyway.

We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for, and we can understand how someone good and noble could inspire us to selfless sacrifice.

But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him.

Hello and welcome to today's Beacon of hope and inspiration. It seems strange to just launch in to these words without preamble or set up, but it perhaps doesn't get anymore encouraging than to read these words from the Bible about ourselves and our relationship with God.

I'm Andy and it is my privilege to be giving the responsibility of looking after the Coach House Church. With that honour comes the encouragement I see in watching people change and flourish as they draw closer to God.

The passage I read comes from Paul's letter to the Believers in Rome, in order to help them understand how much God invests in his creation ... in you and me.

You will find it in chapter 5 verses 6 through to 8 and it is perhaps my favourite go to verse to help put my life in perspective.

It also reminds me of some very real events in my life.

If you know me, then you will undoubtedly have heard that I was a swimmer of Olympic standard, having been chosen for the Great Britain squad for the Montreal Olympics.

I didn't end up going because we had to fund it ourselves and I knew that it would take all of my parent's resources and more to get me there – this was before the days of sponsorship and lucrative lottery funding available today.

The point of me telling you this, is not to boast, but to tell you something of myself which is relevant to another story.

I am a very good swimmer, very confident in my own abilities If you know anything else about me, you will also know that I love nothing more than being in water, especially the sea. On days off you would probably find me, whatever the weather, launching my dinghy and sailing in the Irish Sea off the coast of Anglesey.

Before I started sailing dinghies, it would be windsurfing off the same coastline. There is a reason I now sail dinghies rather than windsurf And this is that story.

A few years ago, I had been windsurfing with a friend when the wind direction and intensity changed. My friend was closer to shore and had come back in in order to change to a smaller more manageable sail size. I was a bit further out and was left trying to battle an offshore wind with a sail that was too big to handle and control. I was swept out to sea pretty quickly and no matter how hard I struggled, I could not hold the sail up enough to get the board under control and head for safety. Every time I lifted the sail it was ripped out of my hand and the effort of hauling it out of the water became harder and harder. I didn't appreciate it at that moment, but I was at a point of exhaustion and getting colder by the second as I was forced into the sea time and time again.

Now just to paint the picture properly, this was in early April and the sea around Anglesey doesn't really get to anything resembling warm until July onwards. Even though the sun had been shining that day, the sea was bitterly cold.

I had the correct equipment on, but my wetsuit was no match for the cold water and the ever-increasing cold wind.

Throughout all this though, I remained calm and in control. I could swim back if need be, no need to panic. I plotted my escape from this predicament.

The shortest point to land as I rounded a headland – time to try and lift the sail again. I stood, I pulled, but the wind was too strong and I looked in despair as the headland became further and further out of reach.

Never mind, the wind direction was pushing me out towards the longest harbour wall that I know at Holyhead. It projects one and a half miles out to sea, and if I was lucky, I might just get to it, safety. If I didn't then it was time to abandon the board and swim the short distance to the end of the wall.

I still was in control; I was still thinking OK and panic was still not an issue for me. This was all within my abilities and confidence.

Then I saw a sailing boat heading towards me from the harbour ... someone was coming out to me. It was the first time that I experienced full on relief and I tried to stand and wave so the captain of the boat could see me clearly in the worsening sea state.

It was then that I realised that I had no strength left to do this. My legs wouldn't respond, I couldn't lift my arms I was exhausted.

Then to my amazement The boat veered away and left me. I was utterly deflated and as I realised that the tide and wind were sweeping me beyond the wall and out towards South Stack and then the expanse of the Irish Sea, something in me started to switch.

To add to my troubles (I hope I am painting a scary scene here ... because it was!) , I looked out to sea and realised that I was in the Shipping lane for the Irish ferries heading towards Holyhead. I also saw as a wave lifted me; the gas turbine powered fast ferry heading straight for me!

I would have been a tiny speck in a swirling grey sea and there was no way that I could be seen from the deck of this huge vessel.

Now I was starting to panic. Unable to move my arms to wave a warning, at the mercy of the tide, wind and waves and now in the path of a very fast-moving ship.... I was in trouble. And more to the point I knew that there was nothing I could do about it. My confidence sapped away as I realised that my body was shutting down to keep my internal organs going. Even my body had moved into its last attempts of survival mode,

I was utterly helpless

Another rendition of that Bible verse we started with, says this

Romans 5 v 6

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. .

I want you to visualise my condition. My own confidence had gone, my own abilities were not going to save me, as good as they were.

There was absolutely nothing I could do. My body had shut down just to keep me alive when suddenly the beautiful, amazing sound of a helicopter appeared over my head.

I will never forget that feeling as it hovered over me and then to my left, I saw the lifeboat smashing its way through the waves to the point the helicopter was highlighting.

As the lifeboat drew alongside me and dragged me into the safety of its crew and the warmth of emergency blankets, my body lost all control as relief surged through me.

I later found out the true extent of my predicament. My friend had seen what was happening and had contacted the coastguard, they in turn had notified the RNLI and the ferry company.

The boat that had come towards me had called my position in, had been notified that the lifeboat was being scrambled and had itself then turned back for safety

The fast ferry I had seen bearing down on me was actually stood still and had been for 20 mins as the coastguard made it aware that there was a craft in its path which it could not see.

And then the helicopter pin pointing my position so that the lifeboat could get to me as fast as possible. I learned that I had been minutes away from hyperthermia and that is why my body had begun to go into survival mode, protecting my vital organs.

I had been rescued from almost certain death and to this day I am reminded of how I felt when my own confidence was taken away and replaced with a certainty of death.

Which takes me back to the bible passage I read from Romans. When I read this, I see the same scenario. My confidence, your confidence, is not enough to help us. We are in need of a rescuer. And God knew it.

God didn't leave it at that...He sent Jesus, His only begotten son (that means that Jesus was part of God, existed with God, not made like we are) – into this world, to take our punishment and to make an amazing sacrifice on our behalf.

My life was of no merit the day I got rescued, I was heading for death the day I got rescued. I could do nothing for myself the day I got rescued.

There was nothing I could have done the day I got rescued.

I just got rescued.

Jesus arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn't, and doesn't, wait for me to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when I was far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get myself ready. And even if I hadn't been so weak, I wouldn't have known what to do anyway.

Thank you, Jesus,



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