

## Heavy Lifting

PCO – 9/28/25

Psalm 146

Exodus 17:8-13

INTRO...

Thank you, once again, for the privilege of participating in worship with you this morning. By now, I suppose, it has probably pretty clear that I tend to lean into the narrative and expository styles of preaching, ie – with description and visualization one steps into the movements and moments of a biblical story to *not only* explore it more deeply...but to do so with *determined examination of the text*. All in the belief that a well-known truth can be remembered **and**, quite often, discover that same truth...*but seen from a different perspective*. God, we know, is always asking us to learn and live in new and, sometimes, different ways.

Last Sunday was the story of Peter and the disciples encountering Jesus on the waters following a storm which caused great fear and uncertainty. We remembered the *simple truth* that both trust and risk are partners in faithful living. There *was, however*, a different perspective within this story: that even though Peter and Jesus may seem like the main characters...there is much to take to heart when we view it all from the disciple's vantage point on the boat. There...the 11 saw and felt and remembered that even and especially in moments of fear and doubt – there is an outstretched hand offering peace **and** a path forward into greater service. It was, quite possibly, a new sightline to underscore that life's purpose and calling may best be seen as a “get to” and “not a got to”.

Similar themes are found in the passage from Exodus. Themes of intentional assistance for those in need *and how that moment in time* doesn't always come when life is calm and easy. Similar and yet...very different.

Instead of being doubtful of our own ability to take that first step and follow Christ's call...this story, when viewed from a fresh perspective asks the why question. When UNCERTAINTY is NOT the issue, **why and for whom** will we say “yes” – *when we know* doing so may ask something costly of us?

Hear now the word of God as recorded in the book of Exodus...

where war is the certainty

EXODUS 17:8-13

## Heavy Lifting

Moses...Aaron...and Hur on a hill top.

The Amaleks and the Israelites in the valley...with horrific suffering for all.

As General William Tecumseh Sherman once said, “war is hell.”

Maybe the first and best question that immediately surfaces from this text is, how does one lead? AND follow? AND deal with all the emotions at play in times of stress and painful decision making?...or do so, even, during the simple ups and downs of daily living?

For today, with this passage, it is especially hard to find a home inside the heart and mind of Moses, don't you think.

What is God *really asking* of me, of you, of us here at PCO? Is there, perhaps, a new perspective which would help us see our faithful place in the world? Surely, there must have been *some uncertainty* when climbing that hill to preside over battle. How difficult it must have been for Moses to follow and decide it best to send his people...his loved ones...into harm's way. Surely, Moses knew that following God was the right decision, but that in doing so he would be known as the bringer of pain and suffering...knowing that so many of his community would be sacrificed...knowing that his climb up that hill would cause the total annihilation of an entire people. Whew...

No matter how faithful one might be...there are days when we can't help but ask, “are you sure about this God? Can't we find a different, maybe even less difficult way to be of service?”

Man o man...God is always challenging us. Right?  
And it can so often feel like a lot of heavy lifting.

And what about Aaron, the brother of Moses, and Hur, a fellow prominent leader within the tribe of Israel? Sure, absolutely, they were faithful...to God...and to Moses. Like Moses, they had no doubt of God's love for the Israelites. And yet they, too, are witnesses to things that are very, very hard.

Lest we forget, the story tells us that they *did not immediately* jump up and leap forward to help Moses in his time of need. It was halfway through the night. For hours...they saw and heard the suffering of others down below.

Scripture can most definitely be difficult – maybe even meant to be in some ways. There are characters and events that can seem so foreign to us. As those who have, however, the advantage of hindsight – who know how each and every story ends - there might be the temptation, dare I even say it, the *habit* of keeping it all at a distance.

And yet we all know, in our heart of hearts, that when, for example, we try to teach our children or grandchildren that *learning and true wisdom and understanding and emotional intelligence* becomes something so much more enduring...when born just as much out of hard experiences as the easy ones.

None of this could have been easy for Moses. And not for Aaron or Hur – not to mention the physical endurance needed to hold up the arms of another for an entire night. *Heavy lifting indeed.*

As I shared when we began, remembered truths...**and** new vantage points from which to view them...are often very helpful in our efforts to fully embrace the biblical story. It may well be that this is NOT AT ALL a lesson whose primary point is: “following God’s commands will carry the day.” I don’t think so...

That’s the *means by which* the story is told...  
*but not the central truth* that lies therein.

Old and familiar truth: helping others in their time of need is an act of discipleship. Maybe even one that is, or at least, near the top of the list. Old and familiar truth as seen from a slightly different perspective: that acting upon the heartfelt need to come forward and help hold up the one in need...especially when it may not be an easy task or one we feel we are best suited for...is the very definition of “answering God’s call.”

The 18<sup>th</sup> century Danish theologian, Soren Kierkegaard played a critical role within religious thought re: the need for each of us to actively comingle our faith with our reason...our philosophies with our convictions.

To see it all as a required responsibility for faithfulness.

He is frequently remembered for this quote: *Often life can be best understood backwards...but it MUST be lived forwards.* Good words... I prefer this one from volume 5 of his Journals and Prayers:

*One central, critical question always remains in the search for both meaning and purpose: **what truth do I wish to live by and proclaim?***

*Finding and living that truth...must **matter above all else.***

Really good words...

Does that feel like “heavy lifting”?

Maybe on some days – yes...and that kind of honest answer is a good thing. It can be hard to even imagine holding up a friend or neighbor or stranger during their time of need – especially when we feel spent and our legs and arms are heavy.

But is it meant to be hard and heavy always? – no. Aaron **did not** leap forward all on his own. Hur went with the conviction that helping Aaron and Moses would lighten the load of his loved ones.

Within this hard and heavy passage there is that central truth that’s all about service above self.

*Come, Open your heart!*

Begins the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse of our closing hymn.

*Show your mercy to all those in fear!*

*We are called...to be hope for the hopeless*

*so hatred and violence will be no more.*

I have always, over the years, had a deep appreciation for the life lived by Abraham Lincoln. When in Washington, he and his assistant always worshiped at the Presbyterian Church a few blocks away from the White House. On one particular walk home following those Wednesday evening services – his assistant asked the President what he thought of the sermon.

As recorded in the assistant's diary, Lincoln said, "there's no doubt that the good Reverend is a fine leader, a gifted scholar and that he cares deeply about his people...and yet the truth is that **he asked nothing of us** this night. The good book, however, always seems to be pretty clear about that request."

Whenever it may feel like "heavy lifting" to give of ourselves to improve the life of someone else...take heart...there are others with us to help lighten the load. **May we feel ourselves** being renewed with strength because the person sitting next to us or down the street or on the other side of the planet – ALSO KNOWS that God is asking something of us...and *is already helping us* move forward in our discipleship.

May we love...and show mercy to all those in fear. For we are called to be hope for the hopeless so hatred and violence will be no more.

Seems to me to be... "a truth...to live by and proclaim...  
...one that very well may matter the most."

LET US PRAY