

“Where Does My Help Come From?”

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Matthew 5: 1-12

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Last week I preached about David and Goliath. It has sparked some good discussion around the church. Last Sunday night Jason Holmes, one of our Celebrate Life evening service leaders, spoke about how, while growing up and into adulthood, he realizes now that he always aspired to be Goliath. He felt that if he could be one of the strong ones, then everything would be fine. He'd be safe at the top. I think we can all resonate with that to a certain degree. We all want to be strong. We want to be strong in body – have more energy, fewer aches and pains ... bigger muscles would be nice too! We want to be strong in mind. I'm not sure Goliath was terribly strong in mind, but in the way that Goliath represents strength, we too want to be sharp and clear and intelligent. We'd also like to be strong in the bank. We want to be financially secure so that if we lose our job or the economy takes a hit, we know that we can still live comfortably.

I also shared a bit at Celebrate Life last week, and confessed that I really don't like November. I'm trying to change that, but the shortening days, the increased darkness, and the pressures of the season sort of conspire to bring me down and make me feel anxious.

My answer to that is to try to talk myself into being stronger and not to beat myself up with negative self-talk when I am tired or weary or depressed or anxious. I long to be stronger; to be more resilient, to be able to handle more. And if I'm honest, I too long to be Goliath. But God does not call us to be Goliath. God tells us, though it's sometimes hard to believe, that we will be better off and more filled and more satisfied if we aim to *have not* instead of aiming to have.

We forget that even Jesus did not come into the world as Goliath. That's what everyone expected as the long-awaited Messiah — the strong man, the father-figure who would save them. There were any number of rulers, dictators and kings in the area. Jesus could have been born the son of King Herod, or better yet the son of Caesar Augustus. Those are people with the power to save.

That's not what they got. Not only was he not born into a powerful or wealthy family — Jesus was born to absolute nobody parents. And you know the story of his birth (and we'll of course talk more about that as the

next weeks go on) but suffice it to say that power, privilege, strength and wealth were nowhere in the picture.

The scripture we read today comes from Jesus' sermon on the Mount which stretches in Matthew's gospel from chapters 5, 6 and 7. It's worth reading. Beatitudes means blessed. Each of the sayings begins with "blessed are". It's a funny list because it's just the opposite of what we think. When we think of someone being blessed or fortunate, we think of someone who has a lot. They are blessed with a beautiful home. He is blessed to have such a great spouse. They are blessed to have those lovely children. They are blessed to live in one of the greatest countries in the world. She is blessed to have such a good job. Being blessed is all about having an abundance of good things. But this list in the Beatitudes is mostly about being blessed because of what you lack.

Blessed are the poor in spirit – in other words blessed are you when you're down and depressed. Blessed are those who mourn – those who have lost people they love. Blessed are the meek – those who have no power and no pride. It goes on, but it's all upside-down thinking. Not only would no one see these people as blessed: many of those listening would say this is evidence that they are cursed.

Now some translations use the term "happy are those" and I don't think that's a good translation. It's important to note that Jesus is not saying that the poor, the grieving, the meek, the merciful always *feel* blessed; he's saying that they *are* blessed. You can be blessed even if you don't feel it.

But even still, how can those conditions possibly be in any way a blessing? Here's the answer: *when we don't have, we are more likely to turn to God for strength, for security, for wisdom, for provision.* Whenever you draw near to God, you are blessed.

When we seek strength, security, wisdom, wealth in the world, it's a sin. Sin is anything that separates us from God. This is not saying you should take on a vow of poverty and be left with nothing. It's a question of where do you seek that security? Those who have nothing are more likely to turn to God.

For some reason Psalm 121 keeps coming at me. I don't know if that ever happens to you but in different settings, Bible studies, a funeral recently, Psalm 121 has come up. When a scripture begins to recur like that, it's pretty safe to say that I'm supposed to pay attention. So, I paid attention and in prayer asked: "God, is there anything you want to say to me through this scripture reading?" Psalm 121 starts out: *I lift up my eyes to the hills—*

*where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

The line that keeps jumping out to me is **“Where does my help come from?”** I feel like God is asking me, “Where are you seeking your help? When you are anxious or weary, where does your help come from?” The honest answer is that often I am not looking to God for help, I’m looking to myself. Folks, self-help can only get you so far! Where are you looking for help? Are you looking to false gods like wealth, physical strength? Or are you able to admit that you are weak and that you need God?

There is so much strength in realizing that you are weak. That’s what Jesus knew. That’s what Jesus lived. That’s how Jesus wants us to live. He wants us to be David, not Goliath.

Now I have to qualify that David became King David and was thought to be the greatest king that Israel ever had. This was a guy who had strength, wealth and so much privilege. I’m not talking so much about that David. I’m talking about the youth who had nothing.

Young David was not even invited to the battle. The only responsibility that his family were willing to give him, the only thing they thought he could handle was looking after the sheep. That and delivering some bread and cheese to his brothers on the battlefield. David wasn’t invited and didn’t belong, and his stronger and more capable brothers let him know it. They mocked him when he started talking about taking on Goliath. But David understood where his help came from. It wasn’t from the armour that King Saul tried to put on him. It wasn’t from military training or his big muscles. His help came from the Lord who made the heavens and the earth. It was in that strength, in the strength of God that David was able to defeat the giant.

Recognizing our weakness and turning to God for our strength is an incredible blessing. There’s nothing quite like having that kind of faith that allows you to put your whole weight on God. Picture everything that makes your life heavy. I know there is probably a lot. Picture that weight. Hold that weight. Now picture sitting back in a lazy boy recliner – some of you watching don’t have to picture it—that’s exactly what you are doing! In the same way that we trust the lazy boy to hold all of our weight, God longs for us to lean back and put all of our cares and worries on him. God knows our worries and I think wonders why we’re trying to do it all.

Today is Christ the King Sunday. The feast of the Christ the King goes back to 1925. This was not long after World War I and the effects of that war were still felt; the memory was still so strong. Dictators were rising

to power. Apparently in Mexico Catholics were being told to place all their authority in the state. As a response, the Pope created this feast so that people would honour Jesus and put their hope in him and not in the state. What the world calls power and what we, as Christians, hold as power has always been a bit at odds and often totally the opposite.

When we worship Christ the King it is true but also ironic. He is not a king like anyone on earth has ever seen. I've been watching *The Crown* on Netflix. In the 3rd episode Diana moves into Buckingham Palace just prior to the engagement being announced.

In one scene, on her first day at the palace, she walks into the room prior to dinner and all the royals are standing in a circle talking. Diana goes to stand next to Charles, but is instantly and sharply corrected because she first has to curtsy to every royal present and in the correct order, from the most important to the least. Not the warmest welcome. She later gets lessons, and we learn that as soon as she is married the protocol will change and some will have to bow to her, and it will change again depending on whether she is standing next to Charles or standing on her own. The show does not portray a lot of grace and humility in the royal family.

Jesus is indeed king, but one who knelt down and washed the dirty smelly feet of his disciples. One who touched the untouchable lepers. A king who taught us to be merciful, to be pure in heart, to be peacemakers and to endure persecution for the sake of creating a right world. The king we worship emptied himself and endured the shame and the excruciating pain of the cross for us. This is a king who serves. And so, we are called to serve.

Instead of filling ourselves up with the stuff and the strength and the power of the world, we are called to empty ourselves. The strange thing is that there is so, so much more when you are willing to empty yourself of yourself and to be filled with the life of the king of kings. Paul understood this in that wonderful passage at the end of his letter to the Philippians:

Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Where did Paul's strength come from? *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

I remember Nicky Gumble, who started the Alpha program, telling the story of Lord Radstock who was staying in a hotel in Norway in the mid-nineteenth century. He heard a little girl playing the piano down in the hallway. She was making a terrible noise: 'Plink... plonk... plink...' It was driving him crazy! But not long after a man came and sat beside her and began playing alongside her, filling in the gaps. The result was the most beautiful music. Radstock later discovered that the man playing alongside was the girl's father, Alexander Borodin, a famous composer.

We don't have to be strong; in fact it's sometimes better if we're not, because as long as we continue to play our part and are open and invite Jesus to come alongside us, he will take our 'plink... plonk... plonk...' and make something beautiful out of our lives which will make a difference far beyond ourselves.

Thanks be to God.