

“Lean On Me”

Psalms 36:5-10

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

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Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

The Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God.**

Life can be humbling, can't it? As soon as we think we have everything in line and our retirement is all set or as soon as we are moving forward on our two wheel bike with confidence or as soon as we finally move to that special place with all our special someone's and feel content and satisfied and settled or as soon as we muster up enough courage and nerve to do something we have always wanted to do, it seems something or someone rises up and reminds us to not get too cocky, too confident, too settled, or feel too invincible.

This of course doesn't happen with everything. Some things work out perfectly and without hiccup. But it is true that sometimes life throws us the curve and we aren't quite ready with a response. It is true that so much of life is out of our control. So, then what? Well, this morning I have good news for us all. Actually, our texts for today have good news for us all.

As I read our texts for today, there were three words that rose to the surface; “Lean on Me.” Whereas life can be unpredictable and out of our control, there is another truth: We all have someone to lean on. Actually, we have lots of someone's to lean on.

These three words can be interpreted from two perspectives: One is from God's perspective, as though God is speaking directly to us saying, "lean on me"; and the second is from a community perspective, as though we are encouraging one another, "lean on me".

Let's start with God's perspective, which is always a great place to start, especially when we feel stuck in life.

We all need God. Can any of us deny that? Our human nature cries out to God for help. Our mischief, our distractions, our justifications, our waywardness, longs for rescue and renewal. Where do we find this rescue and renewal? God. Augustine would say "in the expansiveness of God's grace."

Psalm 36 gives us insight into what that face to face encounter with God might look like. The psalmist's passionate exposition identifies attributes of God that encourage and assure us that we can and should always "Lean on God":

God Loves- God's steadfast love (*hesed*) is for us as God's people and humanity everywhere and in all times; God's love is a love which extends all the way to the heavens.

God is Faithful- God's faithfulness is to all of creation. God will never leave us or forsake us. God's faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

God is Righteous- God's righteousness is translated as the power of all that is good. God is the creator of all that is good; the light and the life. God's righteousness stands like the mighty mountains (unmovable, unshakable).

God Rules- What we are referring to here is God as the ultimate judge. God knows us and holds us accountable to what we do. God's judgement is as deep as the great deep. There is no place we can go to hide.

God Delivers- God saves. God's salvation is for humanity, even animals the psalmist declares. God's salvation is wide and dependable.

Because of these attributes and promises, the psalmist declares that all people are invited to:

Take refuge- Lean on God, for God is our refuge and strength. In God we will receive shelter from the storm, release from captivity. In the shadow of God's wings, like a mother bird protecting her young, we can take refuge.

Feast- Lean on God and we will be fed and filled on the abundance of God's house and table. God is enough.

Drink- Lean on God and we will quench our thirst with the living water from the river of God's delight. As we acknowledged in baptism this morning, the waters of baptism link us with the waters of creation, the flood and the exodus, connecting us with God's creative purpose, cleansing power, and redemptive promise from generation to generation. Jesus tells the woman at the well "those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty; it will become a stream gushing up to eternal life (Jn 4:14)."

Have Life- When we lean on God, we find true life. It is only in the one who created life that we can find true life. "What has come into being in him (Jesus) was life, and the life was the light of all people (Jn 1:4)." "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I (Jesus) came that they may have life and have it abundantly (Jn 10:10)."

See- When we lean on God, we can see. Not just physically, but spiritually. God is the light, the light that overcomes all darkness, making it possible for any of us to truly see. "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then (in God's glory) I will know fully, even as I have been fully known (1 Cor 13:12)."

God, who is both almighty and personal, is our rock, our refuge, our strength. God looks to each of us as God's beloved and says, "lean on me." Brothers and sisters in Christ, when the waters of life rise up, we must first turn to God.

In addition, as an extension of God, we have been given the gift of one another to lean on. This was God's intention from the beginning; that no one would be alone. This is a good thing, because in this wonderful gift called life, there isn't one of us that has it all. We need others.

Forrest Gump, the 1994 American comedy-drama film, based on the 1986 novel by Winston Groom, has become an American classic. With lines like "Run Forrest Run", "stupid is as stupid does," "me and Jenny are like peas and carrots," and "life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you are going to get", the movie is hard to get out of your head. As many of us know, the movie from beginning to end tells the story of Forrest Gump, a boy from Greenbow, Alabama, who fights his way through physical disabilities, childhood bullying, running as fast as he could into a football scholarship at Alabama, and voluntarily enlisting into the army at the time of the Vietnam War where he would earn a medal of honor. Underlying the entire movie is a theme not overly obvious; that in every chapter of his life, Forrest Gump relied on others to get anywhere and know anything. His mother, Jenny, Lt. Dan, and Bubba help make Forrest who he was. There are lots of great scenes, but for me, one of the most memorable scenes in the movie comes when, Forrest and Bubba, who come from different backgrounds, have different gifts and skills, and different dreams and ideas, become an unshakable pair. While in Vietnam, it had been raining for days and everything they owned seemed to be wet. Hoping for a little rest with the water rising,

Bubba looks to Forrest and says, “you lean on me and I will lean on you, that way we don’t have to sleep with our heads in the mud.”

This scene provides a great reminder and a good recipe for life. You lean on me, I will lean on you, and our heads will stay out of the mud.

1 Corinthians 12 gives us insight that we were all indeed created with the need to lean on one another. Paul testifies to the church in Corinth that through the common belief in Jesus Christ, all believers were given gifts according to the Holy Spirit. “There are a variety of gifts, but the same spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are a variety of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.”

Paul identifies one thing that everyone has: the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. We are all to work toward that common good. In other words, our baseline and checkpoint is always “Thy will be done.”

From there, Paul begins to identify with something we do when sorting things for a multitude: one for you, one for you, one for you, one for you. He declares that to one is given wisdom, one is given knowledge, one is given faith, to one gifts of healing, to one miracle working, to one prophecy, to one discernment, to one the ability to speak multiple languages, and to one the ability to interpret multiple languages. It is these, along with others mentioned elsewhere in scripture, (teaching, leading, helping others, generosity, compassion, evangelism, administration, encouragement, service, mercy, hospitality, worship, prayer) that make up the gifts of the Spirit that undergird the life of the church and its work in the world.

We are all given one says Paul. Through the Spirit, according to God’s purpose, we are all given one. What does that mean? You lean on me, I will lean on you, and we will keep our heads out of the mud. To keep our heads up, we need each other. Every one of us needs God in a big way, but we would be foolish to think we also don’t need each other in a big way. We don’t have the luxury to cast anyone aside because we need as many people to lean on as we can find. I can’t say it any clearer, “We are all in need.”

Because of the trap for a few people to do more than their share, even some who try to do it all, the church has, over time and in many ways, lost sight of who really can do what. And since we don’t walk around with signs around our neck saying “prophet” or “interpreter” or “wisdom”, we can lose track of who can help the community, the body of Christ, in its intended mission. People who are working are willing, but they may not be the right people working. We have got to work together and do better in getting that knowledge and building that trust back. In order for the body of Christ to function effectively, we need each other.

This text is clear that there is no hierarchy in spiritual gift giving. We can't take any credit for our spiritual gifts; therefore, the gifts can't be used as rationale for high status in the church or in our communities. All spiritual gifts are rooted in the same Spirit and Lord and serve a common purpose, ruling out any malign calculations of relative value. In this, we need to trust that God provides for this community all we need to be faithful. Not only that God has provided at one time, but that God provides in every time; the past, present, and the future. In other words, there is someone, or someone's here, who is able. Are we willing? For the sake of God's purpose, God's church, and God's mission, I hope so.

This text is also clear that must be willing to call on one another. We need to be more intentional in getting to know one another better so we know who to call when. This community is rich in experience, knowledge, understanding, and dare I even say wisdom. Do we know who to lean on? We know who to call when a leak occurs in the roof or a pipe in the organ begins to squeal because there are those of us who have a trade helping us work with those. We likely have a good sense of who we can call to teach a class or lead a discussion on a particular topic. When it comes to finances, we know who is good with numbers and has the skills to calculate accurately. Who do we call when it comes to needs of discernment, prophecy, understanding, and interpretation? Who can we trust? Who can we lean on so we don't end up with a face full of mud?

Jeremiah 29:11- "I know the plans I have for you" says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." God was and is very intentional about our design, our opportunities and our purpose for living. We aren't made to do life alone. We need God and we need one another.

Who is looking us in the eye today and saying "Lean on Me"? God is for sure? Are others?

Sometimes in our lives we all have pain, We all have sorrow, But if we are wise, We know that there's always tomorrow...

Lean on me, when you're not strong, And I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on, For it won't be long, 'Til I'm gonna need, Somebody to lean on...

Please swallow your pride, If I have things you need to borrow, For no one can fill those of your needs, That you won't let show...

You just call on me brother (or sister), when you need a hand, We all need somebody to lean on I just might have a problem that you'll understand, We all need somebody to lean on...

Lean on me, when you're not strong, And I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on, For it won't be long, 'Til I'm gonna need, Somebody to lean on...

If there is a load you have to bear, That you can't carry, I'm right up the road, I'll share your load, If you just call me, If you ever need a friend call me...(by Bill Withers)