

“Lean On Me: 2nd Edition”
(1st Edition was preached 1/20/19)

OT: Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19
NT: Acts 2:14a, 36-41
1 Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35

I want to begin today with a promise. If you hear anything else and remember anything else today, hold on to this promise. Jeremiah 29:11 reads, **“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.”** (repeat) Take a deep breath, let that sink in and become a part of you. Believe it. Trust it. Lean on it. (repeat)

Some of you might be wondering, why 2nd Edition in the title of today’s sermon? Some of you may not even be aware of today’s sermon title and hey, that is ok? Today’s sermon is a 2nd Edition. A couple of reasons. First, I preached a sermon on January 20, 2019 entitled “Lean on Me.” The message that day was an invitation for us as the church to lean on God and lean on one another. The message was built on the character of God revealed in Psalm 36 and the presence of spiritual gifts given to the members of the body, Christ’s church, in 1 Corinthians 12. Today’s message offers the same invitation to “lean on” with the scriptures just read adding further insight. Second, I chose 2nd Edition as opposed to The Sequel or Part II, because I reiterate many of the same points while considering these new texts and our new circumstances in life. I find that God’s promises for humanity of love, hope, and deliverance often repeat themselves through scripture. In light of application, I find some examples transcend time and circumstance and some are one hit wonders. Whereas there will be some things you may have heard before, there are also new offerings to digest. So, here we go. “Lean on Me: 2nd Edition.”

Life can be humbling, can’t it? As soon as we think we have everything in line and our retirement is all set; as soon as we are moving forward on our two wheel bike with confidence; as soon as we finally move to that special place with all our special someone’s and feel content and satisfied and settled; 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. Life is humbling. We are left saying, *“I don’t know.”*

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 are not quite able to keep our weight and hands back and hit it successfully. The longer and more we live the more we come to realize how much life is humbly and frankly out of our control. So, what do we do?

Well, I have a suggestion...

- When your walls feel like they are closing in on you...
- When the waters are rising above your shoulders...
- When the ceiling comes crashing down...
- When your kids ask one more question, the same question they have asked a hundred times in the last 5 minutes... (those of you at home with kids all day now know what I am talking about)
- When your dog barks at the wind while you are trying to talk on the phone or pees one more time inside after they just went outside...
- When your bathroom becomes your safe shelter from the chaos of your home...
- When the pollen will not stop piling up discoloring your car and everything else...
- When you just want everything to go back to the way things were before...
- When you cannot seem to find the strength for one more day...
- When you are tired of saying goodnight over the phone or on a screen...
- When you are sick and tired of being sick and tired...
- When you cannot think of any more meals at home you might like to fix or eat...
- When you are face to face with your greatest fear...
- When you reach out your hand just hoping someone else is there to hold it...
- When you cannot possibly believe you can teach another lesson via zoom...
- When you cannot imagine watching another Avenger's movie...
- When you throw your hands up and say no more...
- When you receive notice and you cannot work anymore, or your business is on the fence...
- When you sit down at the table and no longer recognize the many blessings right in front of you...
- When your loved one is right there on the other side of the glass door and you still cannot hug them...
- When your plans for a voluntary procedure to help you feel better is postponed because other priorities have risen...
- When you think there is no way you should have to wash your hands yet again...
- When your hair is longer than it has ever been and even your kids scissors seem like a viable option...
- When you miss the camaraderie of live sports or music concerts...
- When you covet those nights out to eat or have a drink with a friend...
- When you miss gathering under the gazebo at MayLynn's or picking your favorite flavor at Mister Goodies...
- When praising God in worship on Facebook or the radio begins to wear thin and you just want to be in a sanctuary again...
- When you are filled with a desire to help, but do not know how...

What do we do when...? We lean.

*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...*

As I read our texts for today, there were three words that again 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. As a matter of fact, being a part of the church, God’s family, means we have lots of “somebody’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”.

We begin again 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.”

The psalmist in Psalm 116 cries out to God, “O Lord, I pray, save my life.” While suffering distress and anguish, the psalmist cries out to God. Why? Because of who God is and what God can do to help bring comfort and peace. Like in so many other psalms, the psalmist’s passionate exposition here in Psalm 116 identifies characteristics of God that encourage and assure us that we can and should always “Lean on God”. That when we pray, “O Lord, save my life”, we have faith God is able and willing. That when we pray, we are actually responding to God’s greatest desire, for God is inviting us to.

God Loves- At the root of all God is and does is love. God’s steadfast love (*hesed*) is for us as God’s people and humanity everywhere and in all times.

God is Faithful- God’s faithfulness is to all of creation. God will never leave us or forsake us. God will reveal God’s self. We can consider here Jesus appearing on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 as well.

God is Righteous- God’s righteousness is translated as the power of all that is good. “All things work together for good, for those who trust in the Lord (Romans 8:28).” God’s goodness is rooted in God’s graciousness. God is gracious and God’s grace protects and saves. (Psalm 116: 5-6)

God Delivers- The same God who delivered Jesus from death to life, delivers our souls from death, our eyes from tears, our feet from stumbling. (Psalm 116:8)

In Acts, Luke writes in the hope of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For all that God did through Jesus was so that we would be renewed and filled with hope. The account we read holds up the people, who are in a predicament, turning to Peter and asking him, "What shall we do?" Peter's response was faithful and invitational:

"Save yourselves from this corrupt generation (Acts 2:40)... Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him (Acts 2:38-39)."

Do you know what I hear Peter saying? "Stop trying to save yourselves! Lean on God! Let the living water wash over you. Be cleaned. Be nourished. Live into and out of your baptismal covenant. Trust in God's powerful love and grace."

And do you know what happened when the people followed what Peter suggested? God's power was let loose upon the people who were open to God's power, and the community grew stronger and closer together.

God's promise to us is when we cannot, God can! Our God, who is both almighty and personal, is our rock, our refuge, and our strength. Our God is looking at each of us saying, "lean on me."

In addition, as an extension of God, we have been given the gift of one another to lean on. If you have ever wondered what the church is this is the answer. God was and is very intentional about our design, our opportunities, and our purpose for living. We are not made to do life alone. We, as the church, are called to be, do, and live together; when the waters are calm and when the waters are raging. Yes, we need God... and... we also need one another.

Many of you have likely seen the movie, or read the book, *Forrest Gump*. 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 story is hard to forget. From beginning to end 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, exposes how Forrest relied on others to get anywhere and know anything. His mother, Jenny, Lt. Dan, and Bubba help make Forrest who he was.

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 together, we will stay out of the mud.

In First Peter, we encounter a reminder of our call to “Holy Living.” Peter declares, “You know that you have been ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold (or stocks or bonds), but with the precious blood of Christ... Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory. Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love (now that you have leaned on God and been filled with God’s love), love one another deeply from the heart (lean on one another in love).”

I have come to believe that one of the most visible signs of God’s love revealed through humanity is an open hand. I would consider an open hand closely related to an open heart and open mind. An open hand is a hand of welcome and support. An open hand is a hand of generosity and strength. An open hand is a hand of willingness and servitude. A big part of our call to “Holy Living” as the church is to have an open hand.

Take your hands and hold them out in front of you face down. Hands facing down long for hands underneath to support. Now, flip both hands over facing up. Hands facing up long for hands above to help support. This position is what I think we as the church have trapped ourselves into being; always able and willing to help and support. This is great because the church is called to help and support, but the reality is we are all in need of receiving support too.

Again, hold out both hands in front of you facing up. Now, take your left hand and turn your thumb to your right, making your palm face down. Now I want you to imagine standing in a circle with others (or you can form a circle if you are with others). Your right hand, facing up, slides under the left hand, facing down, of another person, and your left hand, facing down, falls overtop the right hand, facing up, of another person. Together, we are both supporting and being supported. With our hands in this position, let us consider these familiar words...

*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)*

“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.” Lean on God. Lean on me. Lean on one another. Together we can. Together we will.

Let all God’s people say... Amen.