

“Lean On Me, Too” by Rev. Dr. Peter Thompson

Psalm 36:5-10

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Last week I shared how these two texts for today, Psalm 36 and 1 Corinthians 12, bring to the surface 3 words: **lean on me**. And last week we unpacked Psalm 36 as an invitation from God to us whispering in our hearts, “Lean on me”, and I will be your refuge and strength. “Lean on me” and I will give you rest and feed you and quench your thirst, for “I (God) am the everlasting God, and my steadfast love endures forever.”

There is another perspective in which we can look at **lean on me** as an invitation and that is from the perspective of our communal relationships with one another and our neighbors. We can think of it as, yes, lean on God, and “Lean on me, too.”

You know the song *Lean on Me* by Bill Withers.

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

I have been both inspired and encouraged this week.

If you are regular news watcher and especially if you are a sports fan this week has had a lot of focus on the Buffalo Bills Defensive Back Damar Hamlin, who in the Bills game against the Bengals on Monday night, suffered a blunt trauma heart attack, placing him in critical care. “Love for Hamlin” with the number “3” in the center has become a slogan this week across not just the Bills and the NFL, but across the sports world and general public as well. Rough, tough, and manly NFL players have cried and struggled with the reality of such a site and experience. Normally rival communities and teams that show little tolerance to their onfield competition have embodied compassion in coming together with good wishes and support to Damar and his family. When life gets pushed to the limit, God becomes the only one with answers, and we have seen this as

folks have not been shy about their prayers to God for healing and peace. These acts are no small matter in the world today. These acts exemplify light amid the darkness. Damar is out of coma, and he has talked with his teammates. His first question, “Did we win?”, is a typical athletes concern, but it was rightly met with a much more paramount response, “Yes, you won, the game of life.” I pray we don’t lose focus that winning at life is greater than winning any game.

My next two examples remind me of our Christmas Eve charge to be Blinded by the Light.

I was encouraged and inspired this week at the news of a woman who makes solar lamps, and she is now delivering them to Ukrainians who are experiencing power outages from the war. The look on the recipients faces as the light filled the space was inspirational. The woman offered her prayer that these lights would be like bringing light to the darkness, providing hope amid the fear.

And then I watched a Ukrainian group of youth called “Light Balance Kids” dancing on AGT All Stars. It was filmed in 2021 at the beginning of the war. Luke happened to turn on the replay this week. Their message of camaraderie and purpose was inspiring, especially with the news of dropping bombs and missiles. Whereas the war was keeping the group apart, the invitation from AGT for them to come perform brought many of them back together. Not only is their talent dancing and coding and choreography amazing, their resiliency and bravery and courage to fight the fight by shedding light in the most unlikely of ways during the most unlikely of times is amazing.

God invites us to **lean on me- desire me- want me- trust in me** and we shall if we want anything of a meaningful life. And there is more. Next then, or perhaps while we are leaning and desiring and wanting and trusting in God, we shall lean on these examples of what it can look like to lean on one another. We can lean on those who come alongside us and whisper in our ear, “I know it is tough, lean on me.”, “I hear you that you don’t feel like you will ever get everything done, lean on me.”, “Life is hard and people can be mean and suffocating, lean on me.”, “I hear you that you don’t feel like your boss or your neighbors or your family understand what you are really going through, lean on me.” We all need to lean on God, and we all need to be willing, in the strength of God and faith, to look at one another and say, “lean on me, too.” In doing so we are being extensions of God’s strength and love and compassion. We need God and we need one another. Sometimes I think we try to talk ourselves out of both, justifying comparative suffering and other things that minimize how we really feel, but the sooner we can all have humility and come to grips with our need for one another, the better off we will all be. We are all in need and we are all capable of providing for another’s need. If you think about it, it is the ultimate yin and yang partnership.

Hold up! How do we know that we are capable of providing for another's need? To answer this we can turn to the text in 1 Corinthians 12. In this text, 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.”**

Through the Spirit, according to God's purpose, we are all given a gift of the Spirit, and these gifts are what make up and undergird the life of the church and its work in the world. What does that mean? It means we are all awesome, because we have the Spirit; we are all needed, because we have a gift of the Spirit; and we are all in need, because none of us have all the gifts. God's plan from the beginning of time was to build community. And not just any community, but a community that supported one another and shared gifts and offerings and talents; a community made up of those who are independently strong in God and dependently strong in one another. No one person would possess it all, therefore all people would have value and worth to one another. We don't have the luxury to cast anyone aside because we need as many people around us as we can find.

In regard to the church and our purpose as God's children, we have got to work together and do better in getting this knowledge and building trust back. In order for the body of Christ to function effectively, we need each other. 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 to God. And not only that God has provided at one time, but that God provides in this time. In other words, there is someone here who is able. I would be willing to bet, there are someone's here who are able.

Are we willing? Are we willing to step up and provide our gifts and be apart? And are we willing to call and lean on one another? 1 Corinthians 12 could not be clearer as to empower and impose both of these acts.

Forrest Gump, the 1994 American comedy-drama film, based on the 1986 novel by Winston Groom, is 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”, it is hard to get out of your head. As many of us know, the story from beginning to end tells of Forrest 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 story 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 moments, but for me, one of the most memorable 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.”

Do you want your head to be in the mud? I know I don’t.

Ordination, Installation, and Commissioning of Ruling Elders:

“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.”