

Childish to Childlike: Strength

Isaiah 41: 1-10

Matthew 11: 25-30



There is a story about a little boy and his father. They were walking together when they came across a large boulder. The boy looked at the stone and thought about it a little. Then he asked his father, "Do you think if I use all my strength, I can move that rock?"

The father thought for a moment and said, "I think that if you use all your strength, you can do it."

That was all the boy needed. He ran over to the rock and pushed on it. He pushed and he pushed, and he tried so hard that little beads of sweat appeared on his forehead. But the rock didn't budge — not an inch, not even half an inch.

After a while, the little boy collapsed to the ground, utterly defeated. "You were wrong," he told his dad. "I can't do it."

His father walked over to him, knelt beside him, and put his arm around his son's shoulder. "You can do it," he said. "You just didn't use all your strength. You didn't ask me to help."



The world in which we live tells us that it is all up to us. It tells us that we have to be strong and independent. We are meant to grow up, get a job, buy a house, fix that house when it and the things in it start breaking down, pay the bills, support a family, and on and on and on.

Those things are good and healthy things to be able to do. But, as is usually the case with humans, we take it too far. We try to take on the world alone.

But yet, when your toilet breaks down and you don't know how to fix it, you can call a plumber.

When your finances are a mess, you can talk to the bank about a loan or a refinance or debt consolidation.

When your job situation looks dreary, you can hit up Indeed.com and see what's out there.

It seems we know that we can go places for help when we need it. We know who to reach out to for problems like these.

Why, then, do we not do this in matters of spirituality? We seem to think God thinks better of us when we can do life on our own.

We're like that little boy in the story I shared earlier, childishly thinking he can do the big lifting on his own without asking his father for help.

If we were truly going to our Father for help, we would be spending time in prayer. We would be going to scripture on a daily basis.

And yet, I found a couple studies from the Pew Research Center this week that paint a different picture. In one study, the frequency of prayer among Christians was found to be as follows:

68% of Christians spend daily time in prayer. The inverse of that is that 32% spend time weekly or less in prayer. 9% responded with seldom or never praying.

Now, buckle up because the next part is worse.

Among Mainline Protestant Christians, which would include us as United Methodists, 30% of us spend time in scripture at least once a week. 13% responded that they read scripture once or twice per month, 12% several times a year, and 44% read scripture seldomly or never.

Now, I'm not going to ask for a show of hands or anything, but as I've been saying the last few weeks, Lent is a time of honest self-reflection. And statistically, finding our strength is perhaps an area where we could stop and examine our faith walk.

I will personally admit that my own time in prayer and time in scripture was lacking in the not too distant past. And what I've come to understand since then is that time is not just a good idea – it's vital.

Otherwise, we are childishly trying to be strong all by ourselves.

But we don't have to do that. We shouldn't do that. We weren't made to do that.



Let's read what Jesus tells us in Matthew 11, verses 25-30:

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

²⁷ "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."



If you are weary and burdened (and who isn't, right?), the only place to find rest...TRUE rest...is in Jesus Christ. And what is rest if not how we recharge and renew our strength for what lies ahead?

Christians are not strong on their own. We don't come to Christ once and get a supply of strength that we can then spend as needed when burdens pile up.

It's not a matter of getting baptized and we're good for a life of service to Christ.

It's not a matter of sitting in church on Sunday and we're rested and strong for the week.

Our coming to Christ must be continual.

That's why daily prayer, daily meditation, daily scripture reading isn't just important, it's necessary. It's time to renew our strength, to remind ourselves where our rest is and where our strength is found.



You know, children aren't just an example of how we get things wrong when it comes to our spiritual strength. They can also be the example we should follow when life gets to be too much.

I found some “Dear God” letters on the internet this week written by children, and I thought you’d enjoy hearing some examples of when children know they can’t bear their burdens on their own.

Nine-year-old Lois wrote: “Dear God, please help me in school. I need help in spelling, adding, history, geography, and writing. I don’t need help in anything else.”

Another child had this request: “Dear God, I need a raise in my allowance. Please send an angel to tell my mom and dad.”

Nan wrote: “Dear God, I bet it is very hard for you to love everyone in the whole world. There are only four people in my family, and I can’t do it.”

And finally: “Dear God, my sister Tina has a friend who never stops talking. It would take a miracle to get her to shut up. Do you have any you could spare?”

You might be facing some bigger things in your life right now than these. I’m sure the bills piling up or a scary diagnosis or the loss of a job or the loss of a family member or friend is more of a weight to carry than any of these requests.

But the good news is you can find rest, you can find strength, doing exactly what these four kids did. You can admit to yourself and to God you can’t do this on your own.

Your everyday burdens aren’t going anywhere. So if you’ve been handling them on your own, stop. It’s childish to not admit you need help, and it’s childish to not ask for it.

You’re weary and you’re heavy-laden.

Open your eyes and your heart to a childlike attitude of going to God every day, all the time.

Carve out time in your daily life for prayer.

Find time every day to make that dusty Bible not so dusty anymore.

Go to Christ.

Get your rest.

Find your strength.

And all of God’s people said...