

8/30/26 - Sermon

Why we need community. Or do we?

Today's Gospel reading is from the book of Matthew. Chapter 16, verses 21-28.

From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

"Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

This is the Word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God

Let us pray

Dear God,

As we open your Word today, we pray that you open our hearts. Quiet any distractions around us and within us so that we may clearly hear your voice. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer.

In your name we pray.

Amen.

Today we return to the middle section of the book of Matthew. As we heard last week, Jesus has just changed Simon's name to Peter and called him to be the rock on which Jesus will build his church. That was in verse 18. Now, just five verses later, in verse 23, Jesus is calling Peter—the rock of the church—*Satan*.

Jesus does not need these disciples.

He doesn't need Peter, who has faith one minute walking on water, and the next is faltering and drowning. Peter, who calls Jesus the Messiah, and then turns around and rebukes him.

Jesus doesn't need these disciples who argue about which one of them will be the greatest. These disciples who constantly misunderstand and question him. Who try to make Jesus fit into their expectations instead of opening their hearts and minds to what he is actually telling them. These disciples who will eventually betray, deny, and abandon him in his darkest hour of need.

He doesn't need them.

Yet he still calls them.

Yet he still walks with them.

Yet he still chooses to work through them to bring his light and his message into the world.

Let's go back to our Old Testament story for a moment: Moses, Aaron, and Hur. God doesn't need any of them. God does not need Moses to stand on that hill with his hands in the air. God doesn't even need Joshua's military strategy to defeat the Amalekites. God could resolve the conflict with a single word.

But God doesn't.

God chooses to use a completely human situation—one that relies on community and physical interdependence - to win this battle. When Moses' hands are lifted, the battle goes well; when his arms drop from sheer exhaustion, they struggle and fail. But Moses is human. He is tired, and he literally cannot hold his hands up any longer.

Enter Aaron and Hur. First, let's notice what they don't do. They don't offer spiritual advice. They don't give a motivational speech. They don't even stop to pray with him. Instead, they do something very practical: they pull up a heavy stone, tell Moses to sit down, and they physically take the weight of his arms into their own hands.

And Moses has to agree to let them do that.

Think about how hard that must have been. Moses was the leader, the prophet, the one who spoke to God in the burning bush, the one who God spoke to

face-to-face. The one whose face shone after talking to God. Standing up on that hill with his hands raised made him look like a strong, capable leader. To sit down on a rock and let two other men physically hold his arms in the air required Moses to admit something their culture then, and our culture now, hates to admit: he could not do it alone. He had to be willing to receive help.

And consider what was at stake: if Moses had let his pride get in the way—if he had insisted on standing there alone to prove how strong he was—the army in the valley below would have suffered, the people would have suffered, and, ultimately, Moses would also have suffered. His willingness to accept help was what allowed the whole community to survive and last.

Some of us—though not all of us—are heading back to school in these coming days, stepping into new classrooms, fresh routines, and full calendars. But whether you are packing a backpack, sending a child off to school, or simply navigating the ongoing, day-to-day demands of work and home, we all face a similar hurdle.

Our culture tells us that true success means managing everything on your own. From an early age, we are conditioned to measure our worth by our independence. We are told to quietly handle our own stress and keep our deepest struggles hidden from view. Somewhere along the way, we accept this false messaging that asking for help is a sign of weakness or failure.

Peter also struggled with this mindset. He wanted to be the hero who would protect Jesus and be by his side, insisting he had everything under control, even when he was out of his depth. Moses faced this challenge too. Standing on that hill, trying to carry the weight of the victory by himself until his body physically gave out and he was forced to accept help.

When we refuse to ask for help, we isolate ourselves. We turn life into a solitary burden rather than a shared journey. So in a culture that rewards self-sufficiency and praises people for doing it all alone, we have to ask ourselves:

Why do we need community? Do we need it at all?

God's answer in these texts, and throughout the Bible, is a resounding yes. But not because God is short on power, or because God needs our individual performance. God built us for community. God didn't create us to live life in isolation, but rather one of interdependence. We were created to rely on one another—and that requires the courage to say, "*My arms are heavy, I am tired, and I need help.*"

As Pastor Gin shared last week, we are the body of Christ. We all have unique jobs to do, roles to fulfill, and places to excel. But being part of a body also means

recognizing when it is time to stop trying to do solitary work, roll up a rock, sit down, and let someone else carry the weight.

I'll admit: I like to do things myself. I like them done my way, and I like them done on my timeframe. I doubt I'm the only one in this room who feels that way.

As a single mom, so much of what needed to be done around the house was done by me, in the way I wanted it done. As my sons got older, I wanted to teach them responsibility by giving them household chores, but I also wanted those chores to be done in a specific way—my way. My sister-in-law gave me a piece of wisdom that stuck with me. She said: *"Only give them tasks that you can truly allow them to do in their own way."*

She warned me that if I had a very specific way I wanted the laundry folded or the dishwasher loaded, I shouldn't ask them to do those tasks. Because if I just went behind them and refolded the towels or rearranged the plates, I would send the message that they couldn't do it right—and eventually, they'd just stop trying and stop doing.

That took a lot of effort and thought on my part. I had to learn to let go of control. I had to realize that if I insisted on doing everything my way, I was choosing solitary perfection - and being overwhelmed - over shared growth and responsibility.

That is what Christian community requires of us. To live and grow together. To live together as the body of Christ, we have to let go of the myth that God—or this church—needs our flawless, solitary performance, or that we are the only ones capable of doing something.

When we insist on doing it all ourselves, we rob others of the chance to share their gifts. Recognizing that we have both unique gifts and real limitations helps all of us to serve together better.

If you need someone to watch your kids or hold your baby? Call me anytime, all the time. If you need an electrical box rewired or a wall taken down? I can give you the number of someone who can help you out. You want to play some pickleball or need something baked? I'm your person! But if you want someone to sing a song well and in tune, or need advice on your garden? I've got friends for that.

A good friend of mine is an excellent paper crafter, and her mom is an expert sewist. My friend never learned to sew—and she didn't need to! If we all did the exact same thing, there would be no one to call upon for the things we cannot do. To help us out in challenging times. To walk with us on this journey of life.

Holding up someone's arms doesn't always require a major crisis. Sometimes it's simply baking some cookies, watching the kids, or rewiring an electrical box. And sometimes it simply looks like sitting beside someone who is weary and saying, "You don't have to carry this by yourself today."

When we stop trying to be solitary heroes, we finally catch a glimpse of the real Gospel.

Back in Matthew, when Jesus rebukes Peter, Jesus wasn't rejecting him; he was trying to open Peter's eyes. Jesus was looking ahead, looking to a hill far steeper than the one Moses stood upon. He was looking toward Golgotha, toward the moment when he would lift his own arms, stretched out wide, nailed to a cross to carry the sin and weight of the entire world.

Jesus knew the path ahead of him. He tried to warn his disciples, not to frighten them, but because he deeply desired for them to be with him. In the Garden of Gethsemane, as the darkness closed in, Jesus didn't isolate himself. He asked his friends to stay awake with him, to sit near him, to hold him in prayer as he faced the cross.

And on that cross, as Jesus held his arms up in the ultimate act of self-giving love, he accomplished what none of us could ever do for ourselves. He bore the burden we could not carry. He didn't lift his arms to show off his independence or demand our perfection; he lifted his arms to gather us together—to break down the walls of our isolation and bind us to one another as his body.

You and I do not have to save the world. Jesus has already done that. This season, as we enter new routines and navigate a world that tells us to do it all ourselves, God calls us to a different path:

- To admit when our arms are growing heavy and acknowledge when we are tired.
- To lay down the pride that tells us we have to carry every burden alone.
- To look around and recognize the gifts that others bring to the table.
- And to open our hands—not to grasp for control, but to roll over a stone for a weary neighbor, to hold up each other's arms in faith, and to rest together in the embracing arms of Jesus.

Amen.