

September 12th, 2021

Exodus 17: 14 – 16, “Many hands make light work (sort of)”

Pastor Arndt

¹⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.”

¹⁵ Moses built an altar and called it The Lord is my Banner. ¹⁶ He said, “Because hands were lifted up [to] the throne of the Lord, the Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.”

In Christ Jesus,

“*Many hands make light work.*” You can a version of this proverb in almost every language. It highlights the seemingly obvious truth that many hands make a task easier. Our lesson for this morning, however, seems to challenge this idea. Some of the most important tasks of life can only be accomplished by one pair of hands.

The battle plan given to the Israelites is simple. If the hands of Moses are raised in the air, they win. This sounds easy... until Moses becomes tired. Maybe at some point Aaron stepped in and said, “*Moses, you rest. Give me a try.*” But Aaron’s arms were useless. Maybe they tried doing it together. “*Everybody, raise your hands!*” But their gestures did nothing. The hands of Moses were all that mattered.

There are three thoughts that I’d like us to consider today. The first one is this: Acknowledge that sometimes, only *one* person can do God’s work.

I. Acknowledge- “The Hands on the Wrench”

Not all hands are the same. I learned this as a child. I am the youngest in my family. I have two brothers who are 8 and 10 years older than me. I wasn’t always happy with that fact.

When my brother was 16, his hands were old enough and wise enough to help Dad change the oil on the car. I wanted to help. But when it comes to cracking loose rusty bolts, my 6-year-old hands could only help in a ceremonial way (*and I knew it*). There were things that I *could* do. I became an expert in holding the flashlight. But I was never content. I wanted to be the hands on the wrench.

Does a six-year-old know what idolatry is? My experience tells me “*Yes*”. There was a job to do. The job should have been my focus. My thoughts, unfortunately, were elsewhere. My pride wanted to be able to say, “*I did it*”. I might have settled for, “*We did it*”. What I wanted to avoid at all costs is pointing my finger at someone else confessing, “*He did it*”.

This is one of the plagues of our generation. Failures are labeled with the names of others while every success can somehow be attributed to my genius. Moses, Aaron, Hur, and Joshua are all going to be part of a great victory. The Lord reminds them why they are victorious.

“Because hands were lifted up [to] the throne of the Lord, the Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.”

Who is responsible for winning the battle? It wasn't Joshua with his sword. It wasn't Aaron and Hur who held up Moses' arms. You could just as easily give credit to the rock that Moses sat on. Was it Moses? That idea is laughable with the rest. **Only God can turn the wrench.**

The entire history of humankind is wrapped around a Savior, who disguises his divinity with service. He appears to be small. But don't let his humility mask his power.

Do you believe that there is a God? Well, there he is—a child placed in a manger. As the straw digs into his infant flesh, He puts his hand on the wrench! Do you believe in God? There he is, standing on trial before Pontius Pilate. During his life Jesus silenced every pharisee who approached him. Kings laid treasure at his feet. But now he stands on trial for you. He is slandered, mocked, and beaten to exhaustion, but he says nothing. Why? He puts his hands on the wrench! Do you believe in God? There he is with arms outstretched on the cross. Why does He moan and suffer? He turns the wrench!

With his dying groans he turns it and sets you free!

II. Support the Hands that do God's Work (They Need It)

This brings us to our second lesson: Support the Hands that do God's Work. (They Need It)

If we look at Moses, we find everything that we are afraid of. God does not ask him to lift the weight of the world. God tells him, "Here, hold up a stick". He can't.

There are over 3,000 people mentioned in the Bible. There are 17 prophets in the Old Testament. In the New Testament there are more than 100 disciples that the Lord makes his evangelists. They all carry the message of The Almighty God. Like Moses, they all struggle with it. How many pastors have served here in the 160-year history of St. John's? How many teachers have taught in our classrooms? How many boards and officers and volunteers has God called to serve? We all hold the almighty power of God in hands that struggle to lift it.

This is one of the few times that Israel acts as a body. Aaron and Hur don't holler and scream at Moses chastising him for his weakness. They acknowledge that God has chosen him (in all his weakness) to be the conduit of His grace. If God is going to work through Moses, then their hands will support him.

That is our work as a congregation. We acknowledge that God has chosen each of us in our weakness. Together we function as a body to support one another as God puts your hands on the wrench.

III. Confidently let God place your hands on the wrench.

One of the joys of standing in front of our congregation is the knowledge that my work as a pastor is limited. I get to stand in front of you and share the forgiveness that is ours in Christ. You, in turn, are the ones that take that message home as Moms and Dads, spouses and siblings. I would love to drive home with you and talk about what we learn and do here. I love it even more to know that God puts your hand on the wrench and gives you that joy. My task is to support you and help your hands when they are weak.

We do this confidently as we remember the words of Moses. With exhausted arms he builds an altar and declares, "*The Lord is My Banner. The Lord is at war for me.*" His hands make our work light!

-Amen

