

There's Power in These Hands (Lean on Me)¹

Exodus 17: 8-13

Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some men for us and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; so his hands were steady until the sun set. And Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the sword.

On the playground at an elementary school, amidst the soaring swings and spiraling slides, there is a wooden bench. It's no ordinary bench. It is called the "Compassion Place" and whenever kids are feeling sad and like they need a friend they go over to the bench and sit on it. And when another child notices that someone is sitting there all alone, they walk over to them, reach out their hand, and invite them to play. It's just a gesture. But it drips with extraordinary kindness every time a lonely child is met with an outstretched hand. There is power in these hands because...

*Sometimes in our lives we all have pain we all have sorrow
But if we are wise we know that there's always tomorrow*

It's true, isn't it? We all have pain and we all have sorrow. I mean, each season of life has its unique blessings and issues. As children we journeyed trying to find what it means to be who we are—trying to belong, form an identity, and take in our environments—as blessed and as broken as some of them were. Then we cruised off to college or joined the work force and had to learn how to navigate the world on our own. Then we stumbled into adulthood where bills had our names on them, responsibilities piled up and kids were birthed. And with all of it time slipped by as we wondered how in the world we were going to get through it. But we did. And as some of us sail into our golden years, we are met with the heartache of caring for loved ones and attending the funerals of our friends. Our bones begin to ache after walking up a flight of stairs and a simple cold knocks us out for...well, a lot longer than it used to. Each season of life comes with its pain and sorrow. And we need a compassion place where someone will meet us where we are with an outstretched hand.

*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.*

¹ The song "Lean on Me" is a famous song written and performed by Bill Withers. This song appears in italics when sung throughout the sermon song.

Now I'm not convinced this is everyone, but most of the time we don't like for people to know what we are going through. Maybe we prefer to be private, or it's too vulnerable. Maybe mother raised us that it's not polite to weigh down someone else with our burdens. I mean, how many times have we heard people say, "Oh, I don't mean to burden you with my problems." But isn't the point of being in community—of being a church—that we share what's going on in our lives—the good and the bad—because that's what keeps us going in this crazy world. Isn't the point that when things get hard we have each other to lean on because that is what love calls us to do? So...

*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 sister, when you need a hand
We all need somebody to learn 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.*

There's Moses, standing on the hill. Just like he did when he stood on the precipice of the Red Sea. Moses with the staff in one hand, the other hand raised high to the sky. When his hands are raised, team Israel is winning the battle. But when his hands get tired, the troops begin to wane. It is as if whether Israel prevails or is defeated rests entirely in the power of Moses' own hands. Now before we try to turn this into a "God is on my side" story, we need to be clear that God doesn't show up until the next scene—after the battle is already over. But as the conflict ensues Moses can only keep his eighty-year-old hands up for so long before his arms get shaky. So two loved ones come over and they help him keep his hands up. Moses needs someone to lean on. Just like Job needed someone to lean on. Just like David needed Jonathan to lean on. Just like Mary, after hearing she was pregnant, needed Elizabeth to lean on. Just like Jesus, needed Simon of Cyrene to lean on to help him carry his cross. We all need somebody to lean on at some point. So...

*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. Call me. Call me. Call me.
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.*

For a project in school one day, the children worked on a craft. They cut out a picture of our beautiful world—blue oceans, green fields, brown earth. Next to the globe were tracings of the child's own two hands. Underneath them was a sentence: "These hands can help change the world." It's a reminder. Our hands. Prayerful hands. Powerful hands. Our hands, together, doing God's work. Our hands, together, carrying God's grace to the compassion places in our city and world.

There is power in these hands. These hands can help change the world.

Whether it is a child's outstretched hand on a bench at a playground. Or a couple people holding up an eighty-year-old's hands on a hill. Or hands to help Jesus carry the cross; or hands that reach out to us when we are tired, or afraid, or alone. Along the mysterious path of life, we all need somebody to lean on. I mean, isn't that what it means to be in community? Isn't it what it means to be the church?

*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.*

[The sermon continues at the end of the service]

Charge: So let's hear the words to the chorus of the song more time. But this time let's imagine God is singing these words to us. Listen closely:

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...

Did you hear it? Just as we lean on God, God leans on us too sometimes. Just as God leans on Moses and Mariam. Just as God leans on Mary and Elizabeth, just as God leans on you and me today. There is power in your hands...

Benediction: So go out into the world leaning on the God who is for us, Jesus Christ who is with us, and the Holy Spirit who calls us to lean on one another. Amen.