

From Where Does My Help Come?

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Mike Ramey

Psalms 121

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

My name is Pastor Mike Ramey, the incoming Intentional Interim Pastor. How's your week been going? I've had better as I'm sure all of you have. It feels like we've been transported into an episode of the *Twilight Zone*. It feels surreal. It's like a bad dream. Except that we're awake. Wide awake.

For a moment, I want you to think of this time as a journey – that you're embarking on an adventurous expedition. Some of us don't like taking journeys while others of us love to travel. Regardless, we are on a journey. While we may have a destination in mind, the in-between is uncertain. Unknown. When we started out, we knew where we were heading. Now, we're not so sure. Not so confident. It is unsettling. Just as you turn a corner expecting a clear path, a detour stares you in the face. The lay of the land isn't what we began with. It is not what we were anticipating. It's changed. It's different. We thought it would be an easy "stretch of the legs." But now, we're standing here, looking at hilly terrain. The journey has a great, big bump in the road.

In the days of David, travel through the hill country was dangerous. The paths often had numerous hazards to be navigated. You had to be cautious as you made your way up the mountainside: a slip, a fall, a broken ankle, or worse! And there

were robbers hiding in those hills. They might pounce when you were in a place where you couldn't escape; they might sneak up on you in your sleep. The destination was certain. The journey was necessary. The outcome was uncertain.

"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?"

Uncertain expectations coupled with anxiety and fear accompany the thoughts and the route that lays before us. Tomorrow begins the climb. The outcome is foggy. What if we slip and fall and injure ourselves? Or, what if robbers attack us and we cannot escape them? What if the unexpected happens? Who's going to be there for us? ***"From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."***

That word, "help," is interesting. Another writer may have written, "helper." God is my "helper." He's standing by, just waiting to assist, right? Wrong. He's not a "helper." He's our "help." He's our hope. There is none other. Nothing more is needed. God's it. Cry out for help. God answers. He is the Help in the time of need.

In anxious times and worrisome moments that can be hard for us to believe. "If God exists, why does He let troubles come?" "If God sits on the throne, then why doesn't He make things work for our betterment?" In the midst of crisis, these are questions we hear people ask. In times of peace and prosperity, God is not so uppermost on our minds. But when the storm rolls in and the tragedy strikes, where is God? That's what we want to know. That's what we *demand* to know!

Many people have a secret contract with God that goes something like this: If I am a good, decent person then God must do everything that I want Him to do – to give me pleasure,

keep me comfortable, and never let me struggle. The problem with this contract is that it was drafted by us, but never signed by God.

Joseph was a teenager. His brothers were jealous, and in a fit of rage, they sold him into slavery. He was purchased by an Egyptian officer, falsely accused of attempted sexual battery, and thrown into jail for thirteen years. When he is called upon to interpret Pharaoh's dreams and did, he was elevated to governorship over all of Egypt. When those same brothers of his came begging for food, he showed mercy rather than seek revenge, telling them: **"...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive..."** (Genesis 50:20). God did not protect Joseph from his circumstances; God protected Joseph in his circumstances.

When Nebuchadnezzar overwhelmed and conquered Jerusalem, he took many Jews with him, back to Babylon. Eventually, as was his custom, he discovered talented men among their ranks and put them into his government. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were three such men. Others were jealous. They convinced the king to build an idol of himself and command everyone to bow before it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would not bow before the idol. The king demanded their presence and threatened them – **"And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"** They replied, **"O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king"** (Daniel 3). They were thrown into the furnace but emerged, untouched and unsinged by the flames.

“He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.”

While your journey may be uncertain and your path unsure, you do not travel alone. Surely Joseph felt alone in the slaver’s caravan, at the market huddled with fellow unfortunates, in the prison that unjustly kept him, but the Bible tells us, ***“The Lord was with him.”*** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the furnace, but when the king checked on them, he saw a fourth man with them. You guessed it: The Lord was with them, too. And the Lord is with you as you travel this long and winding road of crisis, calamity, and challenge.

“The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and coming in from this time forth and forevermore.”

Six times. Six times we read the word “keep.” The Hebrew word is *“sh’mar,”* “keep,” who “will keep,” *“yish’mar,”* as the “keeper,” *“sh’mre.”* A *“sh’mre”* or “keeper” was a watchman who protects His people when they cannot see the danger looming before them. We can literally summarize David’s thinking here: God is our HELP who KEEPS us safe as our protector and provider. That was David’s faith. That was his hope. It was his confidence as he stood, a wimpy shepherd boy against a giant, armored warrior named Goliath. God was David’s Help and Keeper as the evil King Saul hunted him down and tried to kill him. He had a Help and a Keeper as he fought superior armies and achieved victory. Through battle, adversity, and pain of his own making, God pulled David through. God was David’s “Help” and “Keeper” through thick and thin. God is your “Help” and “Keeper,” too.

I would like you to turn to Romans 8, where Paul is sharing the hope we all have because of God's everlasting love. Picking up at verse 28, Paul says this: ***"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"*** (Romans 8:28-32). That is your faith. That is your hope.

God tells us stories to share His will and way, His purpose for and place in our lives. We refer to Him as Lord and Creator; He reveals Himself to us as Father and Help and Friend. When Jesus teaches his followers to pray, He begins with, ***"Our Father..."*** That is God's relationship with you. He is your father. He knew you before you took your first breath. He chose you to be His child. He called you to follow him by walking in faith with His Son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to pay for your sins, that by Him you might be glorified. We call God "Father." The Bible tells us that ***"because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"*** (Galatians 4:6). You have a Father-God. He loves you. He watches over you. He gives His only Son to make you His son or daughter for all eternity. ***"From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord!"***

A very smart theologian by the name of Warren W. Wiersbe offers this little commentary about Psalm 121: ***"The things that***

God permits to happen to us in His will may hurt us, but they will not harm us.”

Some may wonder whether God is punishing humankind with the COVID-19 virus. They thought the same thing about the “Spanish Influenza” and the “Bird Flu” and AIDS and the “SARS” epidemics that preceded the current pandemic. Who knows the mind of God? I know I don’t. But I would remind you of what God told Noah after the Great Flood that wiped out mankind: ***“I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease”*** (Genesis 8:21-22). I see in the cross the constant reminder of God’s steadfast love. That is where I place my trust. That is where to put my hope – in the God who so loved the world, He sent His only Son to be my Savior – your Savior...our Savior.

From this hope, I encourage you to be hope-filled people. There is plenty of fear going around. Time for a little kindness and empathy for others. While the campus and facilities of Our Savior’s Way may be closed and access restricted, Our Savior’s Way is more than its buildings and grounds. So, be more. That over-worked, under-paid, stressed out clerk that you perceive as “too slow”? They, too, are a person Christ died to redeem. Cherish them and support them. The IT guy you are online with because you’re having such difficulty telecommuting to work? They also are wondering how much longer they’re getting a paycheck. The frustrated mother who is at her wits’ end, struggling to control her children who are running wild, glad to be free of their isolated rooms? A kind word and a smile could go a long way to relieve her angst. Be that person. Loved by

