

God, Help Us.

A Sermon by Rev. Katherine Schofield

A little boy was spending Saturday morning playing in his sandbox. He had with him his box of cars and trucks, his plastic pail, and a shiny, red plastic shovel. In the process of creating roads and tunnels in the soft sand, he discovered a large rock in the middle of the sandbox. The boy dug around the rock, managing to dislodge it from the dirt. With a little bit of struggle, he pushed and nudged the large rock across the sandbox. When the boy got the rock to the edge of the sandbox, he found that he couldn't roll it up and over the wall of sandbox.

Determined, the little boy shoved, pushed, and pried, but every time he thought he had made some progress, the rock tipped and then fell back into the sandbox. The little boy grunted, struggled, pushed, & shoved, but his only reward was to have the rock roll back, smashing his chubby little fingers. Finally he burst into tears of frustration. All this time the boy's father watched from his living room window as the drama unfolded. At the moment the tears fell, a large shadow fell across the boy and the sandbox. It was the boy's father. Gently but firmly he said, "Son, why didn't you use all the strength that you had available?" Defeated, the boy sobbed back, "But I did, Daddy, I did! I used all the strength that I had!" "No, son," corrected the father kindly. "You didn't use all the strength you had. You didn't ask me." With that the father reached down, picked up the rock and removed it from the sandbox.

This is a story I can totally relate to. Anyone else? Maybe you've seen this story play out in your own life. For me, I always seem to find myself struggling with too many heavy grocery bags, or running errands all over town when I just don't have the time. I don't know why, but for some reason I have a real problem with asking for help. Like this little boy I am so focused on the small stuff of what I'm doing that I don't even realize that the greatest tool I have in my possession, is my connection with other people...

Asking for help is a challenge for so many of us.

Asking for help is the theme of our scripture reading today. To set the scene, in that day there as a corrupt King and evil Queen, who exploited the poor and killed anyone who challenged their power. But there was one man in the land, Elijah, who continued to speak out against the corrupt King and his wife. This prophet wielded a sword of truth and struck down the false prophets who served only power and greed. Now when the King's wife heard about this prophet who was speaking against them, she sent soldiers after him to kill him. Elijah ran for his life, a day's journey into the wilderness, until he collapsed under a solitary broom tree. He cried out to God, asking God to take his life, and possibly using the words we find in Psalm 42 and 43:

"My soul longs for you O God. Why have you forgotten me? My tears have been my food day and night. My adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?" Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from those who are deceitful and unjust, deliver me! O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling."

Suddenly, an angel appeared, touched the prophet Elijah and said “Get up and eat”. He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again. The angel came a second time, touched him and said, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of the food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. As he stood on the mountain there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces, but God was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but God was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. And Elijah asked God for help. Elijah asked God for protection and strength. Elijah asked God to touch the earth with a moment of transformation. And God responded saying, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus...” Elijah returned to the wilderness of the city of Damascus and within a few years, through the power of God and the truth spoken by Elijah, the corrupt governor and his wife were deposed. Sure, it’s true that other corrupt officials took their place, but that’s a story for another time.

The key to this story, one of the most dramatic depictions of the prophet Elijah, is that Elijah directly asked God for help. He asks for help, and he’s helped, not in the way he wants, but in the way that’s in line with God’s will. Elijah wants to die, he wants his suffering to end, he wants to be able to hide away in a cave for the rest of his days, but instead he’s given sustenance, strength for the journey, in the form of bread and water. And guidance from God. But God’s words aren’t exactly words of comfort. They’re words to urge him forward, God demands that he go back to the wilderness of the city of Damascus and face his fears. God gives Elijah exactly what he needs. But he only give these gifts to Elijah because Elijah is humble enough to ask for help.

But here’s the thing, if you can find the strength (or the weakness) to ask for help, that’s the moment where, simultaneously, you can become more fully connected to others and to God. That’s the moment where the divine can enter your life. Because when we think we can do it all on our own, we’re closed off to God. But if you can muster enough strength (or weakness) to even put a prayer on your own lips, or if you can turn to one of the psalms and read those words out loud and say “God where are you”, then you get a direct connection to God in two ways. One, you are saying, I can’t do this alone, which is true. None of us can. Because life isn’t about getting things right on your own, it’s about recognizing that we need each other. But also, if you call out to God, then you are also connected to all the people, all the generations, stretching all the way back in time to the first person, probably Eve or Adam who called out to God in fear and frustration and even anger. We’ve been crying out to God since the dawn of time, and God has been with us, God has seen us through dark times, God has brought us unexpected sunny days. And so we know that in asking for help, we are using all of our strength. It’s not that we’re not strong enough to do what we need to do, when we ask for help we’re showing that we’re strong enough to know that God is our greatest helper.

It may not be the help we expected or the help we wanted, but it will be the help that we need. God knows our every need better than we ourselves do.

So if you need someone to help you run some errands, ask, because maybe that person who helps you really needs someone to talk to, or needs to feel connected to someone. If you’re fighting

with someone and you need that person to understand your perspective, tell them, I need you to listen quietly as I explain my side of things and then I will listen to you. If you need time to be quietly by yourself, put it on your calendar and tell the things in your life that get in the way, no, this is the time that I need. And if what you really need is to feel God's love encircling you, ask God for help, ask God to help you feel connected to the saints of the past and the saints of the future. Ask God to bless you with a special word of scripture or with good relationships and these things will come.

We cannot be healed, unless we truly seek to be healed. We cannot know what direction our lives should take unless we ask for guidance. We cannot feel true comfort and support unless we ask others to share our lives. God has blessed us with the capacity to ask for help. Now it's up to us simply to ask.

Help Us God...