

His Presence Is More Than Enough

Matthew 18:15-20

INTRODUCTION

This was a big moment. The kind of moment where you know you are on the brink of something huge, and you are not completely sure you have what it takes to pull it off. That kind of big.

Just 4½ months ago this group of a million people had been slaves in Egypt. The primary leader of this massive group of people was Moses, a man who had just ...

- Stood toe-to-toe with the most powerful man on earth. Pharaoh. "LET MY PEOPLE GO!"
- Stood in the presence of the most powerful God, listening to His voice, and experiencing the blinding light of His glory.

He had already done two big things that had stretched him farther than he thought possible. Along the way he had also watched ...

- As his shepherd's staff turned into a snake when he threw it on the ground, and it gobbled up a bunch of other snakes.
- As the land of Egypt became invested with flies, frogs and locusts and the Nile River turned to blood, all at his command.

Those were big, but this next task was going to be REALLY big. The word of the Lord came to him as he and the people he was leading were camping out at the base of the mountain, and it told him:

Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... (Exodus 33:1)

Moses knew this day was coming. God had told him about many months prior, so this was no surprise. But now it was here. Moving day. Time to get going. There were miles to walk and nations to conquer, and a group of a million or so whiny people to be led.

And if that were not enough, the very big became completely overwhelming when in the very next breath, God added these troubling words:

(God speaking) But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way. (Exodus 33:3)

Think about it. What would be going through your mind in that moment?

- Would you panic? I would.
- Moses did too.
- Moses knew that those plagues, and the miracles were beyond his doing. God did those things. It might have looked like Moses, but Moses knew better.
- And Moses also knew that he didn't have what was necessary for this overwhelming thing that was staring him in the face.
- He couldn't lead those people.

- He couldn't strategize a military victory.
- He couldn't provide food and water along the way.
- Only God could do what Moses had just been told to do. And now God was not planning to go the rest of the way.

Moses knew if he was going to do what needed to be done, he would need God to be there.

I am always intrigued by how God inspires the writers of Scripture to put certain stories or statements in particular spots. Take today's Gospel reading as an example.

In Matthew 18 there are two really big things we are told to do. Things that none of us want to do on our own. For example:

- We are commanded to restore relationships with people who have offended us.
 - Who likes to confront? We would rather avoid than reconcile.
- We are commanded to make judgments about what is morally right and wrong.
 - Doesn't that sound like a fun afternoon?

Think about those two commands from today's text in light of the story of Moses. Imagine God saying to you:

Go to that person you haven't spoken to in 10 years and rebuild your friendship with them. Let me know how it turns out because I won't be there when you do it.

Or ...

You know that moral issue that gets you riled up... Stand up in a crowded room and tell everyone it is sinful and they need to stop. Sorry I can't be there when You do it, but I am sure I will hear about it later.

But God, in His incredible way of weaving Scripture together, takes those two overwhelming commands and weaves them with a verse that almost seems to be out of context. Look at verse 20:

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. (Matthew 18:20)

Here's the point I think God is making for us.

When life is overwhelming, He is there. You can always count on His presence.

His presence is more than enough for what lies in front of you. Whether it is these two issues or others, God promises His presence. And that presence will be more than enough for what we need to do.

#1: HIS PRESENCE GIVES YOU THE ABILITY YOU NEED

Look at verse 15:

If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault ... (Matthew 18:15)

God never asks to do something that is impossible... if it is done with His presence.

- It might be hard. It might be intimidating. It might make you lose a couple of nights' worth of sleep.
- But if God says to you, "Go and do this thing" it is most certainly possible for you to do it.

That's why Philippians 4:13 says:

I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13)

Notice the verse does not say "I can do all of this ...

- If I try hard enough
- If I think positive thoughts, like the little engine that could.
- If I have enough people cheering me on, like those runners in the final few yards of a marathon race.

It is only the presence of God – through Him – that I have the ability I need to do the things He asks me to do.

There is a story about a small boy who was trying to lift a heavy stone, but he couldn't budge it. His father was standing nearby, watching his efforts. Finally he said to his son: "Are you using all your strength?"

"Yes, I am," the boy cried, exasperated.

"No," the father said calmly, "You're not. You have not asked me to help you."

The child needed to learn to depend upon his father, as an added source of strength.

#2: HIS PRESENCE GIVES YOU THE AUTHORITY YOU NEED

Look at verse 18:

Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18)

When the Apostle Peter made his famous faith proclamation "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God" Jesus announced that this would be the foundation on which His church would be built:

On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:18)

Along with that statement the church was given a level of authority that is known as “the keys to the kingdom.”

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19)

You've all done this, I'm sure. At least I hope I'm not alone. I drive a blue Honda Odyssey minivan – probably the most popular color of one of the most popular models, especially in this part of the country. And because my van looks like a lot of other vans, I have often tried to get into a vehicle that isn't mine.

Not that long ago, Karen and I were each tugging on a car door that wouldn't open, wondering if our key fob suddenly needed a new battery. Why wouldn't this open? Finally I noticed the Starbucks Coffee cup in the spot where my Diet Coke should be. “Wrong car! Wrong car!” I shouted, hoping no one saw the pastor of the local Lutheran Church trying to break into a vehicle that wasn't his.

I had no authority to get into that car, but my fob worked just fine when I got to the vehicle I owned because that fob gave me the authority I needed.

When Jesus returned to heaven He transferred His authority to His followers so that they could continue to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to bear on every situation they would face. He gave them the keys. Today He would hand over the fob.

And as we live out our faith in His presence, we have the authority we need to speak the truth of Scripture into situations that are overwhelmingly frightening. But that authority is only in His presence.

#3: HIS PRESENCE GIVES YOU THE ASSURANCE YOU NEED

Look at verse 20:

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. (Matthew 18:20)

This is another one of those verses that doesn't work in isolation. There need to be at least two to make it work.

Did you know that's why every worship service begins with this phrase:

We are gathered together in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

When I arrive at the church on Sunday morning, there are usually three people already here: Terry Fredrich, Jerry Angst and Steve Garrett. I get out of my car already knowing

that God is present too. Why? Because He promised to be. That is a wonderful thought to have as I start my day.

Lisa Beamer's husband Todd was a passenger on United Airlines flight 93 on September 11, 2001. That's the flight where the passengers attacked the hijackers and brought the plane down short of its intended goal. Todd is the one who said "Let's roll."

In her book, Lisa wrote about her faith journey through that experience:

Slowly I began to understand that the plans God has for us don't just include "good things," but the whole array of human events. The "prospering" (God) talks about in the book of Jeremiah is often the outcome of a "bad" event. I remember my mom saying that many people look for miracles – things that in our human minds "fix" a difficult situation. Many miracles, however, are not a change to the normal course of human events; they're found in God's ability and desire to sustain and nurture people through even the worst situations. Somewhere along the way, I stopped demanding that God fix the problems in my life and started to be thankful for the assurance of His presence as I endured them. (Lisa Beamer: "Let's Roll: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage" p. 69)

Why is it that when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil? Because... I have the assurance that God is with me.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me (Psalm 23:4)

APPLICATION

Moses knew how vital the presence of God was for the task ahead. He pleaded with God not to abandon them.

If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" (Exodus 33:15)

And God went with them.

And He goes with us ... wherever life leads us ... even through the very big and scary places. And His presence is always More Than Enough.

Amen