

# “Tired Arms and a Helping Hand”

January 29, 2012

Exodus 17:8-13

Galatians 6:7-10

There's an interesting passage in Exodus where the Amalekites have attacked the Israelites. Joshua led the Israelites against the Amalekites, and Moses took the staff that God had given him and went up to the top of a nearby hill. Moses didn't just go there as a spectator. He took the staff of God as a visible symbol of God's power. As he lifted his arms up, Moses called upon God's presence. As long as Moses held up his arms, the Israelites were winning. But whenever in exhaustion Moses lowered his arms, pausing from calling on the Lord, the Israelites began to lose. There's a moral here: When God's presence is invoked, there is victory. When we fail to seek God's presence, we face defeat.

There's more to the story. Aaron and Hur were on the hill top with Moses. They could see what was happening. So they got a stone for Moses to sit on. Then Aaron took one hand, and Hur the other, and between the two of them, they held Moses' arms up. Moses was a great man of God. But even Moses couldn't do everything. He needed Aaron and Hur to help hold his arms up. With their assistance, God's victory was achieved!

Life can be a battle at times. We need to lift our arms up to God. He is the true source of our hope and help. But sometimes, in reaching out to God, do your arms ever get tired? There comes a time when we all reach our limit. We need the help of others, as we reach out to God, to make it through another day.

We all need someone to hold our arms up when we grow tired and weary. I truly believe a lot of Christians want to do the right thing. They want to live for God. They want to help someone else. As long as we hold our arms up in petition to God, like Moses of old, we can win the day! But when we grow tired, our arms grow weak. And if there is no Aaron or Hur to prop us up, things may go south in a hurry! One of the saddest passages of the Bible is where Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, shortly before his arrest and crucifixion. Jesus asked Peter, James and John to be present with him as he prayed to God in his distress. Jesus wanted the encouraging presence of these close friends as he faced his hour of trial. But Peter, James and John all fell asleep and were not there for Jesus when he needed them most. What Moses had on the hill in Aaron and Hur, Jesus had to do without in Gethsemane. I've often thought the greatest suffering Jesus endured on Calvary was not the pain of the nails in the cross, but the knowledge that those 12 men he'd poured the last 3 years of his life into all failed and deserted him!

Jesus doesn't ask us to go to our Gethsemane alone. He promises to be with us. And he encourages us to be with one another when we face times of challenge and difficulty. Organizations such as hospice work on the principle of supporting and helping one another in times of dif-

ficulty. As one faces the great challenge when life nears its end, how important it is to have an Aaron and a Hur, others who can support and help the care giver and the one nearing life's end. Hospice requests that each patient have a "primary care giver", perhaps a spouse or an adult child that can give significant care. But to this assistance, hospice adds nursing help, a chaplain besides the family pastor, and sometimes volunteers as well. Thus, there can be several persons lifting up their arms in mutual support at such a difficult time. It makes a difference!

We're hearing a lot about the Super Bowl which will soon be held in our own state capitol of Indianapolis a week from today. It wasn't that long since the Colts played in a Super Bowl, with Tony Dungie as their coach. The Colts didn't quite make it to the Super Bowl this year (!) And Tony Dungie stepped away from the sidelines to follow his heart and spend more time with his family. But one of the places Tony Dungie has been spending time has been in prison! For example, he's gone to Hardee, a prison southeast of Tampa, where the average sentence is 29 years, for things like murder, kidnapping, assault with a deadly weapon and child abuse. Dungie didn't just talk football with the prisoners. He shared his Christian faith with them, talked with the prisoners about the importance of changing their lives, spending time at this prison as part of an on going prison ministry. One prisoner marveled "He could have absolutely been doing anything else but decided to spend time with us. It's uplifting." Dungie not only spoke from a platform to the men, but ate the prison food with them, spent face to face time with them, and went into solitary confinement.

It means an awful lot to know someone else cares, to know you're not alone. Walter Wangerin writes of how he first came to know the depths of God's love. It was through his father's love. As a boy, Walter used to get terrible cases of poison ivy. He would try to lie in bed, moving as little as possible, for each movement would make the itching worse. Walter's mother heard somewhere that Fels Naptha soap helped poison ivy. She hadn't heard that the laundry soap had to rinse the skin of ivy oils within an hour of contact in order to be effective. Rather, she considered it a lotion. So Walter's mother applied Fels Naptha as a lotion to Walter's body, and let it dry and cake.

Then Walter felt really terrible. He couldn't move at all, without the dried soap cracking and making the itching worse. Walter tried to lie perfectly still in bed, to minimize the misery. Walter's father came in and sat beside his son, trying to visit with and cheer up his boy. But the itching got to Walter so much that he could hold back the tears no longer, and he began to sob. Walter's father stood up, his own face full of anguish at seeing his son's misery. Mr. Wangerin did a complete circle in the room, frustrated and helpless. Then he bolted for the door crying "Calamine lotion!" Walter knew calamine lotion was totally useless. But he later wrote "Nevertheless, when my father appeared again with a giant bottle of the stuff; when my father knelt down beside the bed, uncovered me, and began so gently with his own hand to rub it on; when my father's eyes dampened with the tears of suffering, so that I saw with wonder that my pain had actually become HIS OWN PAIN and that it was MY pain that had sent him rocketing to the drug store; when I saw and felt that miracle, a second miracle took place: the ivy did not itch." (Walter Wangerin, Jr. RAGMAN AND OTHER CRIES OF FAITH, Harper and Row, S.F., 1984,

p. 81)

Someone you know in all likelihood is going through a difficult time. Their best hope is to lift up their arms to the Lord in prayer. But as they do so, there will come a time when their arms grow tired. That's where you and I come in. We can't often determine the fate of the battle in the valley. But we can come to someone who's hurting and struggling and encourage them in the faith. Like Aaron and Hur, we can help hold up their arms. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, "Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up."