



Art by Calvary's Youth

YOU CANNOT DO IT ALONE

Exodus 18:10-27

Jethro said, "Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from the Egyptians, when they dealt arrogantly with them." And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God. The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, they

come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God." Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace." So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men from all Israel and appointed them as heads over the people, as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. And they judged the people at all times; hard cases they brought to Moses, but any minor case they decided themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went off to his own country.

TODAY'S PASSAGE FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS does not get featured as "preaching material" in either the Revised Common Lectionary or the Narrative Lectionary. But it is an important story. And one that Presbyterians point to as a model of our church governance and shared leadership.

It seemed particularly apt for World Communion Sunday because, communion reminds us that we are not alone, that we are joined at The Lord's Table by believers in every time and place. We partake in communion every month here at Calvary to remind us of this. But especially this month, in October, we remember that we are connected to a global family, to people of faith in Mexico, Korea, Scotland, France, Gaza, and everywhere in between. We are their companions as we break bread with them this morning.

And in today's scripture, we find that in verse 18, Jethro tells Moses, "You cannot do it alone." Backing up just a verse earlier, we hear Jethro's full admonishments saying, "What you are doing is not good.

You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone."

And then, not only does Jethro tell Moses what *not* to do. He teaches Moses what he *should* do and *how* he should do it.

And Moses actually listens to him! He starts to share the leadership and the burdens of the community with others. Now, I know there are many miracles to be found in the Book of Exodus, the parting of the red sea, manna from heaven, pillars of fire and wind. But don't let the miracle of *this* story get lost on us.

Because, here, a father-in-law gives advice, and the son-in-law listens!

And, let's face it, sometimes the miracles we need are not these huge, inexplicable feats of nature, but in-laws who get along and learn from each other. Right? Sometimes it's these relational miracles that seem even more impossible to overcome.

And not only that, but this man, appointed by God as a leader of the Hebrew people, actually learns to relinquish some of his power and let others lead alongside him. And that, too, is a bit of a miracle.

Because giving up power, as we have witnessed, is no small feat.

But it's about more than just power. It's this misconception that only I can do it the right way, and involving others will make it worse. Now, arguably, sometimes this is true.

I'm reminded of this every Christmas season when my kids want to help me decorate the tree.

Are they actually going to make it better by helping me? No. But should I let them help me any way?

Yes.

So whether it be a work project, or church ministry, or family tradition, it is worth including others and sharing the responsibility. Because as the proverb goes: "If you want to go fast, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together." And maybe we just wanna go fast. But friends, we have far to go.

Now, as I stated before, Presbyterians often cite this story as an example of why we have organized the church the way that we have. Our polity (or the way we govern ourselves) does not allow for just one person to make decisions on behalf of the church. We don't have a pope or any bishops.

Instead, built into the Presbyterian system, are checks and balances, an inherent sharing of power, so that no *one* person can make sweeping decisions on behalf the denomination or on behalf of the local and particular church, like Calvary. If you want power and authority, the ability to boss people around and make them do what you want, becoming a pastor in the Presbyterian church may not be for you.

Far from a dictatorship or monarchy, it is Presbyterian lore to say, that the checks and balances and representative government that we find in the United States is modeled after us, the Presbyterian Church. We were, after all, one of the first to elect our leaders to help rule the greater body for the common good. And we know that at least one of the signers of the Constitution was a Presbyterian minister, John Witherspoon.

Now, we have seen in our current government, a push to perhaps try and erode some of those checks and balances, and frankly, there have been Presbyterian leaders who have probably tried to do the same both as leaders of the church and as leaders in our government.

But when functioning the way that it should, no *one* person should have all the power. And when functioning the way that it should, this model of shared leadership is good for both the leaders and their people.

Jethro, as he witnesses Moses try to do this all on his own says, this is gonna wear you out, and you are gonna take these people down with you. And I truly believe that a leader who is not willing to share power or decisions is a detriment to the greater community. And we *all* suffer for their selfish ambitions.

It is a relief to me that I am not the head of the church, nor is Victor or Joanne or Marcella. The only head of the church is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 12 uses the analogy of an actual body. Jesus is the head, and we are all one part of the Body of Christ. Pastors don't necessarily play a bigger part in this body of Christ, we are but just one small part of the church. Because what would church be without Michael and John and the choir?

What would church be without Jeff and Alison and our children and youth? What would church be without our elders, our deacons, our trustees and elected leadership? What would church be without our facilities crew or our coffee hour bakers and platers? And what would church be without you, coming to worship and building community?

The reality is: there *would* be no church without you. There would be no community without you, no Body of Christ. Theresa of Avila once wrote:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks with
Compassion upon this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world. ...
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Friends, we are entering into Stewardship Season, which happens every fall, so that we can plan for the upcoming year. And every little bit that you give, makes a difference, whether it be of your time, talent, or treasure. Because your giving is not just a financial obligation, but it is a commitment to be part of a community, to be part of this church, in a meaningful and dedicated way. And the thing is, every part of this body has to give and work together, so that we can love God and love people the way we are called to do.

The church needs you. We need each other. None of us can do this alone.

These supposed ideals of the "self-made man," and these "bootstrap-pulling people" is a myth.

It's a lie that will wear us out and take others down with us.

So let us heed the advice of Jethro to Moses. "You cannot do it alone." We were meant and made for community. And especially when it feels hard and scary, we must learn to trust and work together.

One way we practice that, is at the Table. Because we won't always get along with everyone around this Table, and we won't always agree with everyone at this Table. But the radical welcome and love we receive at this Table, is what will transform us to become the Body of Christ.

At this Table, everyone is equal.

At this Table, everyone has dignity and worth.

At this Table, consent is practiced and upheld because everyone's yes and no matter.

And at this table diversity is celebrated. There is unity without uniformity; acceptance without assimilation, & solidarity without sameness.

So, friends, let's eat, for at this Table we find a foretaste of God's kingdom to come, and of God's kingdom which we are building right here, right now. Thanks be to God, Amen.