

*Shiloh United Methodist Church*

Psalm 20

Rev. Tyler Amundson

June 17, 2018

Psalm 20 Common English Bible (CEB)

**For the music leader. A psalm of David.**

**20** I pray that the Lord answers you  
whenever you are in trouble.

Let the name of Jacob's God protect you.

**2** Let God send help to you from the sanctuary  
and support you from Zion.

**3** Let God recall your many grain offerings;  
let him savor your entirely burned offerings. *Selah*

**4** Let God grant what is in your heart  
and fulfill all your plans.

**5** Then we will rejoice that you've been helped.  
We will fly our flags in the name of our God.  
Let the Lord fulfill all your requests!

**6** Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed one;  
God answers his anointed one  
from his heavenly sanctuary,  
answering with mighty acts of salvation  
achieved by his strong hand.

**7** Some people trust in chariots, others in horses;  
but we praise the Lord's name.

**8** They will collapse and fall,  
but we will stand up straight and strong.

**9** Lord, save the king!  
Let him answer us when we cry out!

The psalmist today is spot on for what all parents want for their children. The first line of the psalm says it all, “I pray that the Lord answers you whenever you are in trouble.”

We want our children free from harm, we want God to show up for our children, when we can’t be there to shield them. Whether those children are our biological children, adoptive children, or anyone we love and have cared for in our lives. Being free from harm is the dream of every parent for their own children.

John Wesley knew this when he outlined three rules he used to guide his faith. John Wesley is the founder of the Methodist movement that sprang up in England and journeyed around the world with a message of God’s love and grace for all God’s children. Wesley’s first rule for this Christian movement called Methodism was, “Do no harm.”

Wesley knew as we know, that humans are incredibly capable of doing harm. We can do great things for the world and we can move mountains with our faith. However, as humans we have been known to bury people in the rubble of the process before. We do harm by not paying attention to others, by trying to prevent too much harm from our own children, and in most cases through our own greediness for safety.

Jesus knew we were capable of harming others, but he also knew that we would not live beyond this harm if we did not first understand one thing, God loves us. Even though we are capable of harm and can be selfish at times, he knew God created us with the capacity for love. So to ensure we knew this what image did he use for God in his ministry. Did he use a cosmic image of God, as complex and mysterious? No, Jesus called God, “Abba”, which is Aramaic for father. By using a familiar image, Jesus wanted us to realize that while the depth of God’s

love was cosmic, it was found in the familiar and close knit feeling we get when we understand the love of a parent.

(Today is Father's day, so it seems we can't forget to mention that today.) There is a real challenge in highlighting a whole sermon for God's love as being like a father in any congregation. For some people the image of a father brings up challenging things in their lives, of not feeling they have been good fathers or adequate fathers or of not having a good father themselves. On the contrary it is important to bring up because we should recognize what good parenting is, and how it can impact the world. I want to take time to really share with you the idea of how parenting can impact the world and spread the Christian understanding Wesley practiced of "doing no harm." So today is for both Mother's and Father's, but also it is to remind us we are all parents in some way or at some point in our lives to someone.

First, since when did we become responsible adults.

Parents are generally considered to be adults. By the very definition of adult we think of a parent with the responsibility to care for a child. The question is, "When do we become adults?" Our culture defines that as 18 for many things like voting, penalization under the law, or even when you should move out of your parents' home. For some it is 21 causes for some reason we associate alcohol with adulthood, probably not a great definition. For car rental companies and car insurance companies it is 25, until then you pay more because statistically you are a higher risk. Our culture really doesn't have clear message of when you become an adult and most of the markers I just listed are strange measures of adulthood.

As I was growing up I always saw adults as people older than me and had more of the answers to life than I did. I especially assumed this when I was in college, because I was responsible for myself, and people older than me had more experience. Except I continually found myself

working with people older than me, that really weren't always that experienced in what they were doing. I began to notice that they made mistakes that many of my peers saw coming, and that in reality they were no more adult than some of my peers. The picture of an adult being just someone older than myself began to unravel. I began to realize that adults were just people doing the best they could, with what they had. Just like all of the youth, children and kids I had known.

Throughout college and even until recently I don't really ever think I walked around considering myself an Adult either. That was until a few years ago. I was riding in the car with Corinne, my 3 at the time. She said, "Daddy, are you an adult?" I replied, "I don't know am I?" She said, "Yes, you an adult, grandma is an adult, mommy is an adult, papa is an adult." I realized that she was naming off all the people who care for her, love her and help her grow. I was on that list. I was an adult. She was identifying a select group of people as adults. I thought about her list, all people I know well, and realized that I know these people never have all the answers to life. Especially me, I know for sure that I don't have all the answers. And yet, in that moment a 3 year old identified that I was her adult, a trusted person with answers.

Ever since that day, the thing that keeps popping up in my head is this, "If I am an adult...why does it feel like I am still playing house?" By that I literally mean it feels like I am still making it up as I go along, this life thing. As I dig deeper into that thought I realized more, we are all still making it up as we go along. We are all people doing the best we can with what we have. We are all children in the playground, but someone thinks we are adults.

The beautiful gift in the 3 year old statement was that I saw we are all someone's adult. Someone looks up to you for insight into the world. I can guarantee it. Even when we least expect it someone is calling us an adult, someone thinks we are worth listening to.

If someone thinks we are worth listening to, there comes a power in that. There is a power to offer great love and help people grow, but there is also an ability to do great harm when we make mistakes or act out of greed or malice. We see this every day in a leaders choices to bully instead of offer care, in our world when we can't show up when someone needs us there, and even in those moments when we act without being grounded in love and do more harm than good, even with the best of intentions.

Jesus knew this when he offered up an image of our God as a father, he wanted us to take note that a reduction in harm comes from a close relationship. Not because relationships make perfect love, but because they allow us to work out our love together. We do less harm when we can listen, participate, and listen again in our relationships.

Take one of my favorite authors Glennon Doyle Melton who wrote this:

"I've been sick for a few days now, and these times are always hard on my family. When I'm Lymie I get snippy and critical and dramatic (I know that one's hard to believe). I'm really just no fun at all.

Yesterday, I finally pulled Chase into his room and we lay down together on his bed. I said, "Listen, buddy. I know I've been kind of mean lately."

Chase didn't argue with that, so I went on.

"I haven't been a perfect mom. I'm sorry. I'm going to keep messing up this summer, but just know that I love you. I love you so much, and I'm so proud of you."

Chase stared at the ceiling silently for a while and I thought . . . *oh, crap, this time I've pushed the boy too far.* But then he said, "Listen, mom. It's okay that you're not perfect. Nobody's perfect. You know, when you're not perfect, I remember that I don't have to be perfect, either. It's a relief sometimes."

AND ALL GOD'S MAMAS SAID .....BA- **BAM!!**

DO YOU SEE WHAT HAPPENED THERE?

He gets it. He gets all of it. He GETS that when we quit being perfect, everybody else can quit being perfect too, and we can all just be *human beings* together.  
AND HE GETS THAT THIS IS A BIG, FAT RELIEF!!!

HOLY MOSES. CHASE HAS PROVEN -ONCE AND FOREVER- THAT SUB-PAR PARENTING IS A *PARENTING STRATEGY*, PEOPLE. ARE YOU GRASPING THE MAGNITUDE OF THIS?

Now if you'll excuse me, I must go take a nap so that my kids will understand that they, too, should feel empowered to take naps.

Lead By Example, Friends. Lead By Example.

Love – SUPERMOM."<sup>1</sup>

Doing no harm takes leading by example. We have to demonstrate what it means to examine the way in which we live and practice our

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/glenndon-melton/speaking-of-kairos\\_b\\_3443067.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/glenndon-melton/speaking-of-kairos_b_3443067.html)

faith and let our children see this practice if God's kingdom is truly to be revealed on this earth.

John Calvin said about this psalm we have heard today, that he knows it was for a group of people about to go to war, to protect them. However, he believes by Grace this has become a reminder that we are to be constantly in prayer to remind us that God never leaves our side, that our heavenly parent offers us a constant presence of Grace and love.

Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic Church this past year lived this practice out for a young boy, to cause him no harm and in fact give him hope.

During a public audience in Rome, Pope Francis was receiving questions from children. Young Emmanuel came to the microphone, but in the anxiety of young child could not bear to ask his question. Pope Francis in the moment did what all adults should do, he came to the level of the boy's emotions and invited Emmanuel to come to him. He then let Emmanuel ask his question just between the two of them, and even asked the boy's permission to share the question with the gathered crowd.

You could see on Emmanuel's face the tension and nervousness, but also the earnestness with the need to ask his question. After he asked the question and the Pope prayed with him, and they cried together. Emmanuel stepped down and Pope Francis said, "Emmanuel gave me permission to share his question."

"Emmanuel asked, "Did my father go to heaven even though he wasn't a Christian?"

Pope Francis continued, “Emmanuel’s father baptized his 4 children. He cared for them all physically and spiritually.”

To the crowd he then asked, “Do you think God would want to keep Emmanuel’s father away from God?”

The crowd timidly did not answer, and then the Pope coached them and they said, “No.” No that God would keep a caring father at a distance.

Pope Francis then said, “I think God was sad that because Emmanuel’s father did not have a faith, it was a more difficult life. God was proud of your father Emmanuel.”

“Pray to you dad, pray to your dad.”

In a moment when the Pople could have followed doctrine and condemned the boy’s father, instead he understood the moment. He chose to “Do No Harm.” He considered the doctrine of the church and found within it permission for the closeness of God to be there for the boy.

Friends as we go from this place today, consider how we can be in the practice of being adults as we play out our roles in this world. That as people look to us, we can be in constant prayer to trust God is with us, and we are called to display that love to others by avoiding harm.

Doing no harm this week, means not passively sitting as if we will accidentally avoid stepping on someone, instead it involves us prayerfully starting each day with a prayer to be close to the God who will point us to love.

Go this week my friends and practice doing no harm.

