



The Westminster Pulpit

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

“Help Wanted” **Sermon on Psalm 121**

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We are nearing a time when everyone speaks the same language. “Where are you headed for Spring Break?” We are nearing a time when everyone dresses in their best “366 miles through Alabama” clothing. Nearing the time when everyone piles into SUV’s and starts, “Are everyone’s seatbelts fashioned?” “Everyone’s EarPods plugged in?” “Is anyone listening to what I’m saying? We’re off.”

Back in the day, say of Jesus, there were many who did the same thing. Everyone was talking the same language. They had a common destination in mind. They didn’t call it Spring Break; they called the journey to Jerusalem “Passover.”

Everyone walking in the same direction. No EarPods to shut out the world. People had to do something called “talking” and “listening.” They were in a moment with each other.

A song would often break out on the journey. It wasn’t “99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall.” Many of you know the songs. “God is our refuge and strength, our ever-present aid, and therefore, though the earth be moved, we will not be afraid...”

You may know, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters.” You may know, “O Lord, you search me and know me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up.”

Then, on the last day of the journey, the destination is in sight. Not dead ahead in sight, but up. Jerusalem is a city shining on a hill. Everyone would break out in song.

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

On the journey, everyone knew the words. On the journey, everyone knew the question: “From where will my help come?” Everyone knew the answer: My help will come from the Lord who made heaven and earth.” There’s a comfort in knowing the tune together.

I remember years ago, taking the train from Philadelphia to Princeton, NJ. Being too cheap to take the Amtrak, I would take the Septa train and then pick up the New Jersey Transit train after crossing the Delaware River in Trenton. My train got into the station near midnight. And as I waited for my next train, policemen came rushing into the station. It was some sort of a raid. I ran outside, hailed a taxi. Heart racing, blue lights flashing everywhere, I jumped into the taxi. “Princeton,” I gasped. The taxi driver was as eager to get out of there as I was. We sped off, and I noticed that he had a Christian radio station on. I’m not much on contemporary Christian music, but at that moment, nothing could have been better.

The driver and I were on the same journey; we spoke the same language. We understood one another. We knew where our help comes from; our help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. So it is, our pilgrimage has started. We are on our journey to the cross, to Jerusalem. Buckle your seat belts. We know our destination. Look around the room now and get acquainted with those also on this journey.

If you look around this room, you might find someone trying to navigate this time that we are in. He has just been laid off from his job. He’s looking but every job is filled, or they’ve frozen hiring. Trying not to take that too personally and keeping a brave face on for his family. “I lift up my eyes unto the hills, from where will my help come?”

Look around this space and you might see someone fighting for life. A mother and father with a child who is sick. "I lift up my eyes unto the hills, from where will my help come?"

Look around, there might be Sunday's child, who on Monday, will have to confront the bully at school. "I lift up my eyes unto the hills, from where will my help come?" Here, a daughter worried about how to care for mom and dad. Here, a deep grief of a lost love. It's been years since he passed away. She needs a lift. "I lift my eyes unto the hills, from where will my help come?"

Help wanted. You see, the pilgrimage has already begun. So many of us are heading in the same direction. Sharing the same need. Singing the same song. "I lift up my eyes unto the hills, from where will my help come?" My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth."

Did you hear that? The question is asked "From where will my help come?" The answer comes immediately. "My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth." Makes you wonder why they even ask the question. Why not just start out the psalm with the answer? Except we all ask the question. That seems to be part of the journey. The question is there. Where's my help? The answer, "I know my help."

Reminds me of the father who came to Jesus about his sick child. "If you can do anything, have compassion on us, help us." And Jesus said, "If you believe all things are possible..." And the father said, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." "My help comes from the Lord. From where will my help come?" Back and forth, teetering and tottering.

This is the pilgrimage we're all on. I believe, help my unbelief. I believe.

I think of Jesus heading to Jerusalem. Getting nearer to Jerusalem. Jerusalem dead ahead. Dead ahead. And then someone starts the song! Everyone joins in the song. Can you imagine Jesus singing the song?

I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil; ("On the night in which he was
betrayed.")

The Lord will keep your life. ("This is my body broken for you. This is my
blood shed for you")

The Lord will keep
your going out (“They took him out the gate and crucified him.”)
and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

“The sun shall not strike you by day or the moon by night...” When do you know the shadow of the cross?

I remember Grace Savage. I was a new pastor, fresh out of seminary. Grace, I was told, wanted to meet me. She heard I was a Yankee, so my ordination was in question. I entered her house. She was a frail woman in her 90's but striking. Sharp and stunning. Grace Savage. She was sitting in a chair against a wall with brown paneling. And above her head was six feet of a Texas Long horn. Horns. The image was rather surreal.

She quizzed me on why bad things happen to good people. I came up with my best seminary response. After I finished, she shook her head said, “No, that’s not right.” She said, “Snake. That’s the answer.” Oh, we’re off to a good start. She said, “Boy, have you ever had grits, black eyed peas, collards?” I said, “No ma’am. You see, we won the war and didn’t have to eat that stuff.” Well, you should have seen the way she looked at me. I winked at her. She said, “Boy, I am now in charge of your salvation.”

I fell in love with Grace Savage; we became quite close. I poked at her; she poked back. She mixed her life stories with scripture from the King James Version. She would tell so many stories. She told me how poor her family was when she was growing up. They lived on a farm, and they had their own well. She told me that she had received an invitation to a birthday party from one of the girls in her class that was quite well-off. She said, “I didn’t go to the party. But I was always grateful to have received the invitation.” I don’t know why she told me that. Do you? “O come and let us sing unto the Lord, together.”

She told me that when her husband died, she didn’t understand why all the traffic in front of her house didn’t stop. It didn’t make sense to her. People coming and going when he was no more. I don’t why she told me that, do you? “My tears have been my meat both day and night.”

One day, she fell. Frail. They had placed a Halo around her head. Halo. That’s a strange word for a steel cage. She had a Halo. She told me when she was very sick, “I lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help?” I told her, “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” And I knew why I told her that. Do you?

We are on this great pilgrimage. Buckle up. We are in it together. There are those who raise the question, “From where will my help come? And there are those who have the answer, “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”