

It is not an uncommon scene. A couple of young men found their way into the weight room at the local exercise facility. They were, perhaps, thirteen or fourteen years of age; just beginning to approach manhood; each day the sweetness of self-confidence grows within them.

At first, they hung out on the edge of the weight room admiring that small group that worked out in the facility daily. These fellows are usually in their twenties or thirties. Their bodies have been sculpted by thousands of hours of strenuous, physical training. Their physiques more resemble super heroes than ordinary human beings. The two young visitors watched while, with seeming ease, **one of the body builders did repetitions with a steel bar that actually bent slightly under a weight approaching that of a small pony.**

The young men at the edge of the room were amazed at their ability to lift weight. *“I’ll bet you I can lift that much,” one boasted. “I’ll bet I can too,”* the other retorted. Then they agreed. *“Let’s try it.”* When the bench became available, they rushed over. Just to be safe they took one large plate off each end of the steel bar. Unfortunately, they have had no experience with the reality of even the remaining weight.

One of the young men reclined on the bench, pushed his arms upward. With great effort, he managed to roll the bar with its heavy steel weights from the stand that had been holding it. He lowered it to his chest and discovered he didn’t have the strength to push it back up. **The weight was crushing his chest.** His friend struggled to give assistance, but the bar was too heavy for both of them. **The fellow on the bottom was in big trouble. He could barely breathe.**

After brief moments of struggle, the panicked friend called out, **“Can I get some help over here?”** Inevitably, one of the super hero types came to the rescue. They have been through this before. **In fact, not only have they heard other first-time visitors call for help, they have on occasion called for help themselves.**

That scenario has familiar counterparts. In fact, most of us know at least a little something about needing help because we have gotten beyond our comfort zone. **We are familiar with the plea. “CAN I GET SOME HELP OVER HERE?”**

It was little Billy Johnson’s first day of kindergarten-AND HE WAS FRIGHTENED!! In his brief life, Billy had seldom been dropped off with a room full of total strangers. His mother had tried to prepare him. In fact, she thought she had done everything humanly possible to ready him for his first day of school. However, as she walked down the sidewalk toward her car, Mrs. Johnson looked back toward the kindergarten classroom. There she saw her beloved only child standing on a table in front of the window with his arms outstretched, his terrified face pressed tightly against the glass screaming. *“Hey Mom, can I get some help over here?”*

Colleen was seventeen years old. She has had a driver’s license for about a year. For the most part, she was a very safe, careful driver. Of course, she doesn’t know everything she needs to know about operating an automobile. One Saturday afternoon as she returned from a delightful shopping trip to the mall, she ran out of gas about two blocks from home. **This had never happened before.** She didn’t even know what it meant when the car started sputtering, jerking, and gasping. When the engine died, she tried to start it again. When that failed, she abandoned the car and walked home. When she came through the front door, she called out, **“Hey Dad, can I get some help over here?”**

Unfortunately, feeling the need for a little help can involve issues far more serious than a stalled car or the first day of school. Christine and her husband Dan were returning from an appointment with her physician. Two years ago, Christine was treated for cancer. They assumed this visit would be routine and that the doctor was going to confirm her healthy status. Instead they learned the cancer had metastasized to Christine’s liver and lungs. *In one doctor’s visit, Christine had gone from “cancer survivor” to “cancer warrior.”* Intensifying the throat-clogging worry was the realization that when they get home, Christine and Dan would need to be prepared to help their not-quite-teenage children deal with the news that their family’s future is not as certain as it seemed yesterday. The plea is unavoidable. **“Can we get some help over here?”**

These experiences are not new to this modern age. **Today’s Gospel reading comes from a portion of what scholars call Jesus’ farewell discourse.** It was the evening of Jesus’ **betrayal, arrest, and trial.** The master and his little band of

followers were still in the upper room celebrating their last supper together. Jesus had been telling them in as many different ways as possible, ***“I am going to be betrayed and then killed. I will be leaving you. Tonight, is the night. You must be prepared for this.”*** (vv. 23-27).

When you read the farewell discourse with an open mind and an open heart, you sense a DEEP ANXIETY spreading through Jesus’ followers. ***“You are going to leave us alone? How will we get along without you? Hey, Jesus, we are going to need some help over here.”***

As we might anticipate, Jesus responded with guidance on how to get along when he was not there to direct their every decision; not there to intervene each time they get into trouble. As Mary Hinkle Shore explains, during his farewell discourse, ***“Jesus tried to show them two elements of reality that were difficult to hold together: He was going away, yet he would not leave them alone.”***

Little Billy Johnson’s mother was faced with that difficult task when she saw her terrified son wailing at the kindergarten classroom window. Mrs. Johnson handled it by stopping on the school sidewalk and turning toward her child. She stood there for a couple minutes so that Billy might be reassured by her ongoing nearness. Then she whispered in a way he might read her lips. **“Billy, I must go now, but I will come back. You will be all right. I love you.”**

JESUS GAVE HIS FOLLOWERS THE SAME ASSURANCE!! In vs. 14:18, Jesus says, ***“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”*** In the next few verses, Jesus told his followers that even though the world would not see him, they would sense he was near to them. **When they cry out,** ***“Can we get some help over here?”*** his holy presence would be REAL TO THEM!! **They will feel his ongoing, unbroken love in their midst.**

Of course, there is more to it than that. I am sure little Billy Johnson appreciated seeing his mother standing on the sidewalk but if he was going to deal with the ongoing, terrifying realities of growing up, there were simply some things Billy had to learn.

Jesus touched on this principle in John 14:15. *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”*

In other words, when we need a little help, we are to remember the way Jesus taught us to live. WE ARE TO LOVE GOD AND LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR. We are to love even our enemies and do good to those who hate us. Rather than seek revenge when wronged, we are to forgive. Rather than justifying wrongful behavior, we need to ask to be forgiven. Make it a priority to act in the best interest of others. Be generous with your time, talent, and treasure. Feed the hungry. Do justice. Practice mercy. When you need a little help, do these things. Keep God’s commandments.

More than a quarter century ago, **Robert Fulghum wrote a book, “The Lessons We Learned in Kindergarten.”** “Share everything. Play fair. Don’t hit people. When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.” **Like the teachings of Jesus, these are good practices you could use when you and others need “a little help over here.”**

When seventeen-year-old Colleen ran out of gas two blocks from home, her father was concerned that she be reminded of another of Fulghum’s lessons from kindergarten: “Clean up your own mess.” In response to Colleen’s cry for “a little help over here,” Dad went to a hardware store and purchased a gas can. When he returned, he told his beloved daughter, “Before driving the car, always check the rearview mirror *and* check the gas gauge.” Then he gifted her with that brand-new gas can and told her to figure out how to get the stalled car home. “Clean up your own mess.”

Colleen is now 45 years old. She has carried that same gas can in her car for the past 28 years and has never once had to use it. Colleen now has teenagers who are learning to drive. She tells them the story of the gas can and reminds them, ***“Before you drive the car, always check the rearview mirror *and* check the gas gauge.”***

Robert Fulghum’s final lesson from kindergarten touched on a far more serious issue. He wrote, “Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup (you planted in class) — **THEY ALL DIE!!** and **SO, DO WE!!** ***I will die. You will die and every single person we love will die. And, quite simply, we have to learn to deal with that and a multitude of other painful realities.***

That was the concern for Christine and Dan as they drove home from the doctor's office with the news that her cancer had returned with a vengeance. Trying to quiet the internal anxieties they dealt with daily was going to require more than a warning to keep the commandments. Dealing with the terror they experienced would even require more than a gentle reminder of the near presence of God. When they call out, **"We need some help over here,"** they are talking about a fear that has the bitter taste of bile at the back of their throats; a fear that takes their breath away.

The apostles were dealing with a similar depth of anxiety that they experienced on the night of the last supper. **Jesus responded to their call for help with the promise of "the Advocate."** This was nothing less than the Holy Spirit, the living presence of God, the power of the resurrected Christ in their midst. **Jesus went on to say that this Advocate from God "will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said"** (v. 26).

More than that, the power of the Holy Spirit will bring you peace. Not the peace that is declared by the standards of the world, but the peace that is the Shalom of God. As Jesus put it, ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you... Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."***

God's response to our cry, ***"can I get a little help over here"*** is the **Advocate**, the **coming of the Holy Spirit**, the **deliverer of the peace of God**. God's Shalom quiets our fears and gives us the strength to deal with our current fears/problems. God's Shalom offers courage to live triumphantly not only when faced by the first day of school or an empty gas tank, but to live courageously in the face of hurricanes, earthquakes, weapons of mass destruction, bombs planted at the finish line of the marathon, uncertain personal finances, divorce, grief at the loss of a loved one, our own terminal illness, as well as the courage to face and not fear PANDEMICS, WARS, WHITE SUPREMACY, ECONOMIC CHALLENGES & all those other BEASTIES & THINGS that go bump in the night.

You will have those moments similar to that young man pinned on the exercise bench with far too much weight pressing down on his chest. **You will have those moments when you cry out, "Hey God, I need some help over here."**

When that happens open your mind and your heart to the "PROMISES OF FAITH." When you need His HELP, remember Jesus' words... ***"Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."***

Why should we not BE AFRAID?

BECAUSE God promises to:

- NEVER LEAVE US ALONE,
- but instead "MAKE A HOME WITH US!! Amen