

“From Where Will My Help Come?”

Psalm 121

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Every once in a while, the psalmist feels overwhelmed by what lies ahead. He or She sees a hill and it appears as a mountain! The psalmist comes to a brook and it looks more like an ocean. Though usually full of gratitude, the writer of the Psalms occasionally feels like someone has just knocked the wind out of his or her. Psalm 121 opens with this tone of anguish, “From where will my help come?”

This is a profound question! It’s a question that adult mission trip advisors ask as they realize the enormity of the tasks that lie ahead. ‘How will we pull this off?’ It’s a question youth ask as they head to Providence, Rhode Island. ‘How will we cook for 100 homeless people when I’ve never cooked a meal in my life?’ It’s a question parents ask as they bless their sons and daughters off to Portland, Maine with Habitat for Humanity. ‘How will they repair a roof? They’ve never even lifted a hammer!’ From where will my help come?

Fortunately, the answer to this question comes in the verse which follows: ‘My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.’ This is the voice of wisdom! This is the voice of life experience. This is a voice we can trust. This is the voice of one who has been to the darkest valley, to the place of utter despair, and has discovered the truth that God has never abandoned him. This is the voice of a woman whose heart has been broken or the voice of a man who has been rejected in love. ‘My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.’ This is what we call a statement of faith. It can only be spoken by one who has taken the leap of faith and found God to be utterly reliable.

So, I am inviting all the mission trippers to carry this Psalm 121 with you. Tape it to the bumper of your van. Write it upon your brown bag lunch. Inscribe it on a two X four. Stitch it into your pillowcase. Doodle it into your peanut butter sandwich. Call it to mind first thing each morning. Memorize it. ‘My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.’

Like most of you, I spent the past week processing a myriad of emotions. I tried to have a healing presence wherever I found hurting people. I grieved with some. I stood in solidarity with some. I tried to imagine what it’s like to be hated. I prayed a lot, mostly I prayed for an end to homophobia. And I saw how providential it was that I was working with Psalm 121. ‘From where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.’

The phrase, ‘who made heaven and earth,’ really sticks with me. Implied in that phrase is the truth that God made everything, that God made all people, that nothing lies outside of the realm of God.

Each Sunday, we light a flame for those serving in the military. When I gaze upon that flame, I think of those men and women as my own sons and daughters. I feel I am related to each one. And as I saw the faces and names of the more than 50 who died in Orlando, I had that same feeling. These are my own sons and daughters. We are related. It wasn’t ‘them’ and ‘me’; it was just us. So, I am lighting a candle now as a sign of our common humanity. I can’t help but call to mind the words of the poet, John Donne: (pardon the exclusive language)

Each man’s death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

Wherever you find yourself this coming week: on a mission site or at the beach or on the pickle ball court or at the office, carry the words of the psalmist with you. “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” In this way, we can continue our journeys in the greatest of hope. Amen.