

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
August 7, 2016**

Exodus 17:8-16

"Lift Up Your Hands to the Lord"

Hymns: 472 – 573 – 434 – 309 – 408

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

⁸ The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. ⁹ Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."

¹⁰ So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. ¹¹ As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. ¹² When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. ¹³ So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven."

¹⁵ Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. ¹⁶ He said, "Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the LORD, the LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation." Exodus 17:8-16

In the name of the Lord Jesus, brothers and

sisters in Christ:

The operation took more than seven hours. It was a delicate, life-and-death procedure that required all the skill the doctor had. For seven long hours this one-time Beverley Hills surgeon who had left fame and fortune there, now labored as a medical missionary in a make-shift hospital in South Korea. His American visitor watched in awe as the doctor worked. When the operation was complete, he said to the surgeon, "I'm curious. What would you have been paid for such an operation back in Hollywood?"

The doctor laughed. "A bundle, that's for sure," he replied.

"And what were you paid here, today?"

He laughed again and reached for a dented coin on his desk. "For starters, I was paid with this. She came in, poor thing, for an exam. It was apparent that she wouldn't live long without the surgery. 'What will the operation cost?' she asked. Then she handed me this coin and said, 'Will this cover it?' I took it and said as seriously as I could, 'Why, that's exactly what I was going to charge you.'"

The doctor fondled the coin, and then his eyes grew moist as he told his visiting friend, "But the big payoff was ..." He paused and held up his hands and said, "for the past seven hours I had the wonderful, wonderful feeling that these were the healing hands of my Lord, Jesus Christ. That was my real payment."

Moses knew that same feeling the day in our text, didn't he? For hours his hands were lifted up to the Lord until victory was won. Though his arms probably had no feeling in them when it was over, what a tremendous joy Moses felt in his heart — to be so used in service to God's people!

It is that same joy of being useful to the Lord and to His people that God wants each of us to know. So He encourages us today to:

"Lift Up Your Hands to the Lord!"

Lift them up expectant of His blessing. Lift them up strengthened by those He places around you.

I. Lift them up expectant of the Lord's blessing

As Moses and the people of Israel traveled from Egypt to the land God promised to them, the land of Canaan, a fierce desert people known as the Amalekites attacked Israel. In other places the Bible describes this as an unprovoked and cowardly attack, for the Amalekites struck at those at the end of Israel's procession where the elderly and children followed behind the main company. The attack seems all the more vicious because the Amalekites were the descendants of Jacob's brother, Esau, and thus were blood relatives of the Israelites. It is for these reasons God pronounces such a harsh sentence on them in our text, saying, ***"I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven"*** (v.14).

Though God did eventually carry out that judgment, Amalek, in a sense, still stands in the way of God's people, opposing them on their journey to the promised land. This "Amalek," as it were, is sin — sin which, directed by Satan, attacks where we are weakest; sin which is related to us by blood, for the same sinful nature that lived in our first parents following their fall from grace, lives also in us. This "Amalek" attacks us in our marriages, trying to drive wedges between spouses. Sin feeds our fears, fills us with negative attitudes, and fuels the fires of anger. The power that sin exercises over us is a reminder of the Apostles Paul's words, ***"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"*** (Eph.6:12).

How helpless we feel before so vicious and powerful an enemy! At times we become frustrated when we are unable to break the power that sin exerts over another's life. Those of you who live with an unbelieving spouse, those of you who have known the power of addiction to alcohol or drugs in the life of a friend or relative, those of you who worry about grandchildren walking away from the Lord — you can relate to Joshua leading the campaign against the Amalekites and making no headway.

You fight until you are weary and there is no victory. Again on other occasions, it seems that everything stands in our way to God's promised land. We find ourselves spiritually numbed by tragedy, by chronic illness or overwhelmed by financial and family problems. The question is, where do we turn when "Amalek" and his powerful allies make war against us?

Moses knew where to turn, didn't he? While he gave Joshua command of the army of Israel, Moses' trust was not in human strength but in the Lord. His battle plan is clearly stated in the words, ***"I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands"*** (v.9). With arms lifted to God in supplication and that staff that symbolized the power of God in his hand, Moses would pray while Joshua fought the battle.

What a powerful reminder this should be of our Lord Jesus Christ! He is our Champion, our Joshua, who, as Dr. Luther said, *"For us fights the valiant One, whom God Himself elected. ... He holds the field forever."* (CW Hymn 200, v.2). The names Joshua and Jesus, interestingly, have the same root in Hebrew and mean, "He who saves." Our Jesus took on the enemy in bloody combat. He suffered all that sin and Satan could dish out. But He held the field and through the cross triumphed over these foes for us all. Like Moses, our Lord's hands were also lifted up in supplication. Those hands prayed for all of us in the Upper Room. Those hands were lifted up on a cross as our substituting Savior died for us. Those hands were lifted up in blessing on His followers as He, the risen Lord, ascended into heaven with the promise that He would continue to be our Mediator with the heavenly Father, praying for us.

Lift up your hands to the Lord. This is the privilege God gives His people through His Son. God waits to hear our prayers. He longs to hear our requests for His help. He even sends the Holy Spirit to help us in our weakness when we pray. And in this special relationship we enjoy with God through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord also surrounds us with other supporting hands.

II. Lift them up strengthened by those He places around us

We don't know how many hours Moses held up his hands in prayer. If you try to do that you will find it doesn't take even an hour and your arms grow numb. We are told **"*whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning*"** (v.11). Seeing this, Aaron and his brother-in-law, Hur, made the connection between those arms of Moses lifted up in prayer and what was happening down on the battlefield. So they came to the rescue, and with combined fresh strength, supported Moses' arms while he prayed.

I believe the lesson the Lord is teaching Moses and all of us too, is two-fold: First, "Trust Me. Turn to Me in your time of need." That's primary. But the Lord is also teaching Moses that he can't do it all by himself. God, as He often does, was preparing Moses to accept the help of others. In the very next verses after this story, Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, comes to him to tell him that he needs to learn to delegate some of the work to others. Up to that point in time, Moses had been working solo: deliverer, provider, dispute settler, leader and more. Weary arms needed to be strengthened and supported by other arms of God's people. This is in accordance with God's plan for He doesn't call us to be Lone Ranger Christians; He calls us to work within a body of believers.

Inspired by the thought of Aaron and Hur holding up Moses' arms, the hymn writer reminds us:

If you cannot be a watchman — that is, a Moses or a pastor or a teacher — pointing out the path to heaven .

With your prayers and with your bounties — bounties are your talents and the ability to support God's work with strength and offerings — You can do what God demands. You can be like faithful Aaron, Holding up the prophet's hands.

Yes, you can!

I am reminded of the story of the bricklayer whose brother was a famous violinist. One day the head of the construction company commented, "It must be great to have a brother who is world famous." Then, hoping he hadn't just

offended his worker's pride, the boss added, "Of course, we must accept the fact that talent isn't equally divided even in the same family."

"That's right," said the bricklayer. "Why, my brother doesn't know the first thing about bricklaying. It's a good thing he has me to build a house for him."

When you and I were baptized, we were not just baptized, period. We were baptized into the body of Christ. We became part of this spiritual family, this fellowship of believers. The faith God planted in you makes you a brother or a sister in Christ, related to and dependent upon all others in this body. And though— we are different from one another, we need one another and each other's gifts, just as Joshua needed Moses, and Moses needed Aaron and Hur.

Now sometimes I hear people say, "Ah, what can I do? I'm too old ... I'm too young ... I'm this or I'm that." True enough! Moses at age eighty couldn't be expected to pick up sword and fight, but he could and he did pray. So, too, Pastor Voss, your teachers, your congregation leaders need your prayers and your support, those "bounties" as the hymn writer called them. We are joined together in this body of Christ to accomplish for our Lord what would be absolutely impossible for us to do alone. We would also remember that the burdens we are asked to help carry, the tasks laid before us, are not some unwelcome load, not extra tasks our Savior asks us to take on in order to complete the requirement for our salvation. No, that job is done! He did it all for us. These tasks are our joyful service to Christ because we ***have been*** saved. They are your thank-you to the Lord!

So who really defeated the Amalekites that day? Whose hands were most important in winning the victory? Was it Joshua holding the sword? Or Moses, hands lifted in prayer? Or Aaron and Hur, holding up Moses' weary arms? The answer is, it was all of them—all together. Each one was vital to that victory.

It is no different today. God wants you to lift your hands to Him in prayer and in service, and He wants us to support and strengthen one another even as we do so. Will you do that? Will

you lift up your hands to the Lord? Will you lift up the arms of others who need you? That's the lesson of this story. May we learn it well and never forget it.

Amen.