

Making Room  
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha  
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**Psalm 103:1-8**

- <sup>1</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name.
- <sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and do not forget all his benefits—
- <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,
- <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the Pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
- <sup>5</sup> who satisfies you with good as long as you live  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- <sup>6</sup> The LORD works vindication  
and justice for all who are oppressed.
- <sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses,  
his acts to the people of Israel.
- <sup>8</sup> The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

We're nearing the end of our summer focused on Joan S. Gray's book, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook*, and our penultimate quote is this: "when we operate out of our weakness, we leave God plenty of room to work."<sup>1</sup> To be clear, this is not suggesting that we give up because we can't do certain things and wait for God to take care of them. Instead, this is an invitation to stop insisting we can do by ourselves even the things at which we are not strongest and to invite God in to supplant, in whatever form, what we lack. This is, of course, complementary to what I spoke of at the end of last month when I confessed that I try to overpower any weaknesses I have felt, despite God's willingness to help. I affirmed that "I have strengths which God uses. And I have weaknesses which God can use, does use, whether I give my permission or not."<sup>2</sup> When we operate whole-heartedly,

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<sup>1</sup> Joan S. Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009); p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Nicole Farley; *Weak*, July 31, 2016.

wholly, in concert, with our weaknesses, we partner with God rather than put up roadblocks for God with our stubbornness and ego.

Admittedly, as humans, we have a heckuva time letting go of that ego – we’d rather thwart God if it means we can still remain in control. So much so that this struggle has become part of our biblical canon.

**Setting:** mountain of God, shrubbery aflame but not burnt to a crisp; Moses stands open-mouthed; God voiced off-stage

**God:** “I’m sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the People of Israel, out of Egypt.”

**Moses:** “But why me? What makes you think that I could ever go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

**God:** “I’ll be with you.”<sup>3</sup>

**Moses:** “They won’t trust me. They won’t listen to a word I say. They’re going to say, ‘God? Appear to him? Hardly!’”<sup>4</sup>

**God:** “That stick in your hand? You touch it and I’ll make it a snake and then back to a stick again. Your hand? I can cover it with leprosy and then make it whole again. If you take water from the Nile, I’ll turn it to blood.” “So if they don’t trust you and aren’t convinced by the first sign, the second sign should do it.”<sup>5</sup> “And if that’s not enough, the third should definitely convince them that you are my servant.”

**Moses:** “Please, I...I don’t talk well. I’ve never been good with words, neither before or after you spoke to me. I stutter and stammer.”<sup>6</sup>

**God:** “I’ll be right there with you—with your mouth! I’ll be right there to teach you what to say.”

**Moses:** “...please! Send somebody else!”<sup>7</sup>

**End scene.**

And then there’s Jeremiah who responds to God’s call with, “Look at me. I don’t know anything. I’m only a boy!”<sup>8</sup> So often we try to back out, saying, “Sorry, God, I have weaknesses, I guess you can’t use me. Nice talking to you, though.”

And while we don’t read that the apostle Paul argued against God under the claims of a weakness, we do know he asked God to remove his weakness. We read from Paul in the second letter to the Corinthians: “Three times I appealed to the Lord about [the thorn in my

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<sup>3</sup> *The Message*, Exodus 3:10-12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Exodus 4:1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Exodus 4:8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Exodus 4:10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Exodus 4:12-13.

<sup>8</sup> *The Message*, Jeremiah 1:6.

side], that it would leave me, but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”<sup>9</sup> “When we operate out of our weakness, we leave God plenty of room to work.”

As we work to find a contentedness with our own weaknesses, following the example of Paul, we come closer and closer to singing with joy the psalmist’s song: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God’s holy name.” **ALL** that is within me. Noted theologian Father Richard Rohr wrote, “what I let God see and accept in me also becomes what I can see and accept in myself.”<sup>10</sup> This can be far, far more difficult than it sounds. If we are taught from our earliest ages that God loves it when we are good, whether spoken or not, we are also being taught that God does not love it when we are not good. And that message sticks as much, or more than, the spoken one. It could just be me but I suspect that you, too, could name several things about yourself that “God doesn’t like.” My ego, my proclivity to judge, my knee-jerk (emphasis on the “jerk”) assessment without knowing any bit more than superficial details. And these are just the first that come to mind.

I do, indeed, try to keep those from God’s sight or, at the very least, I hope God didn’t notice because, after all, God doesn’t like it when I focus on or do those things. Or God doesn’t like **me** when I do those things. Let me explain. As I was writing the sentence “I hope God didn’t notice because, after all, God doesn’t like...” I looked back to what I said about the unspoken message we get and this is what I originally wrote: “If we are taught that God loves **when** we are good, whether spoken or not, we are also being taught that God does not love **us** when we are not good” not “If we are taught that God loves **it** when we are good...God does not love **it** when we are not good.” Whether you believe in the teachings of Freud or not, that action of my subconscious is undeniable. Of course I don’t want God to know about the things I do “wrong” because my subconscious self isn’t

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<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:8-10.

<sup>10</sup> <https://cac.org/meaning-spiritual-love-2016-08-19/>

thinking that God doesn't like those things but, much more personally, God doesn't like me. But that's not true; that way of being doesn't fit a God of unconditional love, who loves like no human, even the best intended, can.

“What I let God see and accept in me also becomes what I can see and accept in myself.” Accepting doesn't mean that I am going to stop working on my ego, my proclivity to judge, and my knee-jerk assessments. If I stop hiding them from God, because I am ashamed that I have not banished my weaknesses by myself, then I am freed to ask God for help in amending my life; I make room for God to work. I give God space and I receive God's grace. And I come closer to blessing the Lord with **all** that is within me. So may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: God, we have asked you to remove our weaknesses and you have assured and comforted us with the good news that your grace is sufficient for us and that your power is made perfect in our weakness. Help us to welcome this good news, we pray. Amen.