

Sermon at St. Thomas by Lynn E. Cunningham. October 21, 2007. Gen. 32:3-8, 22-30; 2 Tim. 3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8a.

1. The Psalm just said begins: I will lift up my eyes to the mountains, From where will my help come?
 - a. And the psalmist answers the question with the familiar refrain: My help comes from the Lord; The maker of heaven and earth.
2. These words will come up again in this sermon, and whenever I say “My help comes from the Lord” I invite you to respond, “the Maker of heaven and earth.” You can say it quietly, or just under your breath, “The Maker of heaven and earth.”
3. Last weekend, Dorothy and I were in Las Vegas to celebrate a kind of mini- family reunion with my eldest brother, Jay. We were able to go out to dinner with him, in spite of his seriously weakened heart. He much appreciates your prayers. My middle brother, Robert, was there as well, as well as Robert’s two grown children, and Jay’s two daughters and their husbands.
4. Then on Sunday, Robert and one of Jay’s daughters and her husband came down with some kind of serious intestinal bug. They were all feeling pretty under the weather when Dorothy and I left Las Vegas on Monday. Somehow Dorothy and I were spared that bug, but then Las Vegas always involves gambling.
5. We had a good time together, but there was an underlying theme of severe illness. I noticed myself and all of us trying to respond to various illnesses by wanting to practice medicine on the each other. In a culture where everyone is surrounded by access to doctors, and modern clinics and hospitals, I find it almost irresistible to want to offer medical advice and home remedy cures.
6. But with all this modern medical care, I find myself asking, is not the real and fundamental question: where really does my help come from?
7. [If] I lift up my eyes to the mountains: where does my help come from?
 - a. And is not the best response: my help comes from the Lord:
 - b. **RESPONSE: THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.**
8. When I think back over my life, I have mainly worked as a lawyer for low income people. I spent much time with people suffering from quite severe disabilities. My job for a while was to help them navigate the legal obstacles to obtaining Social Security disability benefits.
9. I also worked with families who were facing the loss of their housing, either through foreclosure on sub-prime mortgage loans, or from their inability to pay their rent.
10. From all these years of helping, it seems to be almost in my nature that when I am in the presence of someone who is in crisis, my first instinct is to want to DO something to help them get out of their crisis, whether the crisis is with their health, their living conditions, their legal situation, their family situation, whatever the crisis is.
11. I raise this, because I feel I am not alone in approaching people in this way. I observe this approach in many folks in Dubois. There is a natural, and healthy urge to reach out to people who are in crisis in practical ways, and just do something for them.
12. But I believe it is just as important to remember where the real source of help comes from. It is just as important to lift up one’s eyes to the hills and ask where does my help come from?
 - a. And to hear that sacred response: our help is from the Lord:
 - b. **RESPONSE: THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.**
13. This experience of mine with Jay and Robert is typical I believe of most people when they have an ill family member or friend. Where are the medical people?
 - a. When the sacred, fundamental question is:
 - b. Where does help really come from?
 - c. And the response is: Our help is from the Lord,
 - d. **THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.**

14. Two weeks ago, several of us were at the annual convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming, including: Kay Jacoby and Mary Ellen as the parish representatives. Dick Hodge was there as a member of the Diocesan Council. As well as Dorothy and Kathy Hodge.
15. Naturally the convention dealt with some business items, such as election of new officers, review of the Diocesan budget, and the annual report from Bishop Caldwell.
16. But actually most of the work of the convention centered around ministry. How to improve on our ministries in all the parishes of the Diocese? In other words, the convention centered on the question of how can each of the parishes in the diocese teach people in Wyoming how to ask the prayerful question: from where is my help to come?
 - a. And to get in touch with the prayerful response:
 - b. My help comes from the Lord,
 - c. THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.
17. Most of the time of the convention was spent inviting everyone there to ask, how can we move our parish ministries from stability to vitality.
18. How can we do better at showing the light of Christ in our communities?
19. After church today, during the carry in meal, Kay Jacoby, Mary Ellen, and Dick Hodge will give a brief report on the diocesan convention, so that you will know more about what is going on around Wyoming and what directions we are moving in to strengthen and support the life of ministry here.
20. The lessons today portray with unusual power the insight that our help comes from the Lord,
 - a. The MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.
21. In the Genesis story, Jacob finds himself in deep trouble. He has cheated his own brother, Esau, out of Esau's right to the family inheritance, and Esau has come hot on his trail chasing after him with a large band of 500 armed men. Jacob is fleeing, trying to get away, and stops to camp for the night.
22. While Jacob sleeps, an angel of the Lord comes to wrestle, to contend, with him. The angel cannot overcome Jacob, and Jacob demands a blessing from him. The blessing is a new name, Israel, the name of the new nation that Jacob will be ancestor to. And Jacob realizes that he has "seen God face to face, and yet his life was preserved". Thus, the Genesis passage reveals something about the Lord. The passage reveals that the Lord is a God who is not far away. Genesis shows a God who intervenes directly in Jacob's life and transforms that life, because the help of the Lord is not far away, but intimately tied into Jacob's life.
 - a. Jacob could all but be heard to say with the Psalmist, when I lift up my eyes to the hills, and ask, from where is help to come? He received the answer, My help comes from the Lord:
 - b. THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.
23. The Lucan passage accords with that insight. It seems there was a widow in the city who came repeatedly to argue her case before the judge, a judge who feared neither God nor had any respect for people. She pushes her plea with such fierceness and persistence, that finally the judge grants her relief just to get her out of his courtroom. The point of the story, Jesus says, is that if that unjust judge can finally give in to the pleas of the widow, how much more will God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?
24. Jesus says, I tell you, God will quickly grant justice to those who plead to him. God is the God who grants help to the pleas of God's people.
25. Now here, I suppose, I should tell a practical story from modern times about a person who asks for help from God, and then receives it. Our attitude tends to be, okay, I hear what you are saying about help coming from the Lord, but I want you to prove it by giving some kind of example. Maybe an illness that someone had, they prayed to God for help, and then they got healed. The kind of miracle stories that are also found in the gospels,

- and in the Book of Acts.
26. But Jesus in the story of the widow before the unjust judge, and our church in its understanding of ministry, are pointing to something deeper and longer lasting, something more than looking for God to grant the occasional miracle now and then.
 27. Jesus instructs us continually to place our entire trust in the help of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, not just in practical worldly action taken while hoping for that occasional miracle thrown in from time to time.
 28. Ministry, and our ministry to each other must be seen to begin and end with trusting in the ever present help and love of God that continually surrounds us and all that we do.
 29. The help received from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, comes from the continual love from God with which God always surrounds us.
 30. Looking to heal or cure each other by means of doctors, or other professional helpers apart from this help of God is incomplete. On the other hand, taking these healing actions grounded in an awareness of God's helping presence, transforms them, and leads to healing the whole person, not just their physical symptoms, their physical needs, their practical issues.
 31. No one in Dubois fails to understand what it means to lift up their eyes to the mountains. Let us help each other always to ask, from where does my help come?, and to hear the sacred response:
 - a. My help comes from the Lord
 - b. THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.
 32. In Jesus' name, Amen.