

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
Worship This Week June 1, 2025

SCRIPTURE INTRO – The journey through the desert towards The Promised Land continued. It was more than a physical journey. It was a spiritual exercise in growth. They were learning (the hard way) how to trust in the Lord. God tested their faith by putting them in places where they lacked water and food. Instead of trusting The Lord, they complained to Moses. Of course, God did not bring them out of Egypt to die in the desert. Step by step, He was making them into a great nation. Greatness comes about not overnight, but in stages. Every leg in the journey was an opportunity to grow. Unfortunately, it was a step or two forward and a step or two back. It was a painful experience.

Not that we have it all together in 2025. Far from it. We continue to struggle to completely trust God for everything. Not just the physical necessities of life but the spiritual life. Physical water poured from that rock in the desert. And it provided life. Spiritual water – living water – pours from the Rock that is Christ. The Promised Land is all around us if we open our eyes to what God is doing, if we obey His commands and live according to scriptural truth.

So far in the journey, the enemy was within. Today, we see Israel face to face with a new enemy – a foreign nation in their path.

SCRIPTURE – Exodus 17:8-16

While the people of Israel were still at Rephidim, the warriors of Amalek attacked them. 9 Moses commanded Joshua, "Choose some men to go out and fight the army of Amalek for us. Tomorrow, I will stand at the top of the hill, holding the staff of God in my hand." 10 So Joshua did what Moses had commanded and fought the army of Amalek. Meanwhile, Moses, Aaron, and Hur climbed to the top of a nearby hill. 11 As long as Moses held up the staff in his hand, the Israelites had the advantage. But whenever he dropped his hand, the Amalekites gained the advantage. 12 Moses' arms soon became so tired he could no longer hold them up. So Aaron and Hur found a stone for him to sit on. Then they stood on each side of Moses, holding up his hands. So his hands held steady until sunset. 13 As a result, Joshua overwhelmed the army of Amalek in battle.

MESSAGE – This was Israel's first military battle as a nation. (Egypt was not a battle because the Lord fought for them.) And it would be the first of many. Amaleks were ruthless people and their attack was brutal. We are told later in

Deuteronomy that “They attacked you when you were exhausted and weary, and they struck down those who were straggling behind. They had no fear of God” – Deut. 25:18. God sometimes makes it easy. But most often, He delivers enemies who do not play by the rules or who appear to be too much to handle. The reason is to force us to trust in the mighty hands of God. If the battles were easy and the enemy was weak, then we would be tempted to take credit for ourselves.

This is the first time Joshua appears on the scene. He was Moses’ assistant, who became a great warrior and took leadership of Israel after Moses died. He’s best known for his leadership as Israel finally entered the land of Canaan. Joshua had the honour of leading this first battle. It was probably more of a challenge. This was a nation who might have known hardship, but was hardly battle ready. They had no direct experience in war.

Moses supported the battle behind the scenes, busy in prayer. At first glance, it appears to be a little over the top and silly. In fact, it matches the definition of superstition: “events which may be influenced by one’s behaviour in some magical or mystical way.” Hold up your staff and the army advances appears to be little different than a magician waving a magic wand and a rabbit appears out of a hat. Moses was no longer a young man. He could not stand for long and needed help to hold up his hands.

We know that this is not magic at all. It was prayer. The deliberate act of raising his arms was adopted by the nation as a posture of prayer, in the same way we might bow our heads or fold our hands. Holding up one’s arms is a physical way of saying, “Glory to God.” The staff is a symbol of God’s power and authority. It’s not a magic wand. It’s a symbol of the fact God wants to work with us. This is just the latest example of God showing his power through Moses’ staff. The staff is first mentioned in the Exodus 4:2, when God appears to Moses in the burning bush. God asks what Moses has in his hand, and Moses answers, “a staff”, which is miraculously transformed into a snake and then back into a staff. When Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh, and Aaron’s rod is transformed into a serpent. Pharaoh’s sorcerers are also able to transform their rods into serpents, but Aaron’s rod swallows their rods (Exodus 7:10–12). Aaron’s rod is again used to turn the Nile blood-red. It is used several times on God’s command to initiate the plagues of Egypt. During the Exodus, Moses stretches his hand with the staff to part the Red Sea. While in the wilderness after leaving Egypt, Moses follows God’s command to strike a rock with the rod to create a spring for the Israelites to drink

from (Exodus 17:5–7). Moses does so, and water springs forth from the rock in the presence of the Elders of Israel. This is the Living water.

The raised arms and the staff are reminders that God requires us to work in partnership with Him. And with each other. The fact that Moses required help from Aarin and Hur is a demonstration that we are invited to work in partnership with others. The battle being led by Joshua and his soldiers was hard work. Prayer is also hard work. The job of supporting the battle in prayer was difficult and Moses could not do it alone.

Of course, prayer is sometimes easy; not always. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul described the ministry of Epaphras, who was “always struggling on your behalf in his prayers” – Colossians 4:12).

Because of this work of prayer Israel was victorious over Amalek. We are left with no other option than to say if Moses, Aaron, and Hur did not do the work in prayer, Israel would have been defeated, and history would have been changed.

These two powerful lessons on prayer – pray without ceasing and pray with others – are reflected throughout scripture. We know this as intercessory prayer, in which we pray for the well being of others. It’s also seen as “standing in the gap” between God and the person or people for whom we are praying. A powerful example in the New Testament is the story of Peter’s friends gathered as a group and praying for him while he was in prison.

SCRIPTURE – Acts 12:1-14

King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. 2 He had the apostle James (John’s brother) killed with a sword. 3 When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter. . . . 4 Then he imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover. 5 But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him. 6 The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate. 7 Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, “Quick! Get up!” And the chains fell off his wrists. 8 Then the angel told him, “Get dressed and put on your sandals.” And he did. “Now put on your coat and follow me,” the angel ordered. 9 So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn’t

realize it was actually happening. 10 They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the city, and this opened for them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him. 11 Peter finally came to his senses. “It’s really true!” he said. “The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!” 12 When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. 13 He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it. 14 When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed . . . she ran back inside and told everyone, “Peter is standing at the door!”

MESSAGE – Twice in this passage we are told that the church was praying hard: “. . . the church prayed very earnestly for him” (12:5) and “he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer” (12:12). Peter was scheduled for the same sort of execution that James experienced. But on the very night that he was to meet his death something wonderful happened. Upon his release, Peter didn’t go home to sleep or to get something to eat. He went immediately to where his friends had gathered for an all-night prayer vigil. They knew how desperate the situation was. On a physical level, they were no match for Herod and his soldiers. What they had was the power of prayer.

It’s unfortunate that when Rhoda ran back to tell the others that Peter was there, they did not believe her. They’d been praying all night for deliverance and yet they didn’t believe that Peter had been delivered. All of this tells us that first – prayer can be effective. “The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results” – James 5:16. Do we believe that? We have all prayed earnestly and without ceasing without our prayers being answered the way we want. And so we are tempted to set the bar low so as not to be disappointed.

Here is where the posture of prayer is important: Moses had his arms lifted up. It was an outward demonstration of what was in his heart. We know that the spirit is will but the body can be weak. The assistance of Aaron and Hur was a powerful demonstration of strength in numbers. Brothers and sister gathering together, raising our hearts and, if necessary, our arms in prayer.

That is what Satan wants: for God’s people to be discouraged and demoralized. It is one of the tactics of war, whether military or spiritual. Do not allow the enemy to get you down. Make no mistake; it takes effort. Moses was losing strength but he persisted with a little help from his friends.

“Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere” – Ephesians 6:18.

Prayer can be done alone. And it must be done. But it cannot only be done alone. Where two or three (or twenty or thirty) are gathered, the Lord will be with them.

“I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them” – Matthew 18:19-20

I have no doubt that The Lord was with Moses, Aaron and Hur on that hill overlooking the battlefield. I have no doubt that when we earnestly pray today, with our hearts fully devoted to God and our spirits open to inspiration from Christ’s own Spirit – whether we are alone or with others — the Lord is with us. Amen.