

"Refuse To Go It Alone"
By Rev. Edgar F. Solís
November 14, 2021

Intro.

Rabbi Harold Kushner tells a great story about the amazing power of companionship, connection, and friendship: "I was sitting on a beach one summer day, watching two children, a boy, and a girl, playing in the sand. They were hard at work building an elaborate sandcastle by the water's edge, with gates and towers and moats and internal passages. Just when they had nearly finished their project, a big wave came along and knocked it down, reducing it to a heap of wet sand. I expected the children to burst into tears, devastated by what had happened to all their hard work. But they surprised me. Instead, they ran up the shore away from the water, laughing and holding hands, and sat down to build another castle. I realized that they had taught me an important lesson. All the things in our lives, all the complicated structures we spend so much time and energy creating, are built on sand. Sooner or later, a wave will come along and knock down what we have worked so hard to build up. When that happens, only the person who has somebody's hand to hold will be able to laugh.

How many times in our lives have we had a similar experience? We believe that we are doing well, and suddenly, a wave of hardships comes to knock down our plans, projects, or hope. But also, how many of us have been blessed with the company of someone who has taken our hand to express their presence and support when it is most needed?

Context matters

In the gospel reading today, we have what I consider one of the most beautiful and outstanding declarations from Jesus in the gospels, the Lord and savior of the world.

The ultimate expression of God here on earth is clear. Jesus's words are compelling and empathetic. *"I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father"* A more literal translation of "Friend" in this passage is "Philos" or "Loved one" To be Jesus' friend is to love Jesus and be loved by him. But then, if we carefully read the following verses, Jesus declares, *"I appointed you to go"* to do works of love, which means that the love of Jesus produces a community that lives and expresses the love of God to everyone! To what end? To do works of love, to manifest and extend God's love to everyone!

It is crucial to understand the context of Jesus' words. In the New Interpreter Study Bible, we can find that *"Jesus believes the community's relationships are governed by love and its relationship with the world (Human systems that opposed God's work and presence in Jesus) will be governed by hate, persecution, and the possibility of death. All of this played an important role in the formation of early Christian identity."*

Theological Reflection

In other words, as we live and move in a system that is governed by ways of thinking and practices that are against God's principles and purposes. Many times, we can suffer from that opposition, knocking down our Hope for a better world. But we must remember that we, as people of faith, are called to walk with the company of Jesus in community.

Our Hope for a better world and a brighter future for our lives, families, and community necessarily must involve the company of a friend, a brother, or sister. We need to understand that walking our journey of faith in Hope alone is an impossible task

In one of my fall semester classes, one of my classmates asked the professor Dr. Sims, the following question. "How can we overcome all this stress, anxiety, and loss that the global pandemic has brought to the world, the communities, and the church? How can we as Christian leaders lead our congregations in the midst of all of this turmoil and desperation?"

We all were waiting with great expectation for Dr. Sims' answer. We were waiting for an outstanding theological response. But Dr. Sims' words left us all with a jaw-dropping expression. He doesn't give us a fantastic explanation. He just gave us a word. TOGETHER. This was a dramatically short but powerful response. We may not have all the technical or detailed answers of how we will face all the hardship that life can bring to our existence. We may not have all the answers for every human suffering and challenge. Still, certainly, we must walk TOGETHER. Yes, together with Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit, together in our community. We must face all the challenges and problems, together! Today it is essential to refuse to go it alone in our journey.

Application

Pastor Ray Johnston in his book, *The Hope Quotient*, says we, as people of faith, need essential relationships in our Christian journey in order to walk the journey with Hope. Here are four relationships that can express God's company as we move forward in our journey.

1. Vision Casters. We all need someone who will give us a vision for who we can be, far beyond anything we ever imagined. We need people who stretch our vision and help us

dream bigger dreams. We want individuals around us who have a way of sparking a huge new vision.

2. Soul Sharpeners. Some people turn you on spiritually, and some people turn you off spiritually. Hang around with those who turn you on. A Soul Sharpener helps you develop spiritually, daring you to be all you can be in the spiritual arena. They will not let you settle for second best.

3. Models and Mentors "People seldom improve when they have no model but themselves to copy after," said the poet Oliver Goldsmith. The apostle Paul wrote to young Christians, "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice" (Philippians 4:9). Christian leader Oswald Chambers wrote, "The way we grow in holiness is to be around people more holy than ourselves."

4. Heart Healers. Dr. Paul Tournier wrote, "It is impossible to overemphasize the immense need people have to be really listened to, to be taken seriously, to be understood. . . . No one can develop freely in this world and find a full life without feeling understood by at least one person."

There will be times when we all suffer from hearts that are broken or cynical or hard or discouraged. We all have times of despair. People of Hope suffer these things just as others do but people of Hope also work to bring Heart Healers into their circle of friends because they know they will be in better emotional shape because of them.

Dear church, God is with us, Jesus is walking the Journey of life with all of us, with you with me, but God also expresses his presence to others through you. We are not alone

on our journey. Hope in life also involves the company of our family, our friends, our brothers, and sisters.

Amid this overly individualistic western culture, people of faith and Hope are called by God to walk the journey together. Refuse to go it alone and walk with Jesus and let us walk together with Hope into a brighter future! Amen!