



# FROM THE PULPIT

## *North Shore Congregational Church*

### ***“Man Vs. Trailer”***

**Rev. Dr. Martin W. Hall – Preaching**

*Psalm 90: 1-2, 17; Matthew 11: 25-30*

*July 31, 2016*

Ok – so this story goes back about 3 years now. Our family was on the way from MA (where we were living at the time) to visit our friends and family in MI, and we were spending the trip in our camper. On our way, we stopped for the night at a small campground in PA. We pulled into the campground for the evening and our site wasn't quite level, so we had to pull the tires of one side up onto a couple of blocks to level it out (not at all an unusual process). So, that's what we did. We pulled up onto the blocks, chocked the wheels, began to disconnect from the truck...and, that's when it happened. You see, apparently I had left a little of the rear tire still edging off of those blocks a little. So, as I disconnected the trailer from the truck, the entire unit began to slide backwards down the slight slope of the campsite.

Now, I need to pause for a second and make sure everyone has a proper vision of this scene. We're not talking about some 12' pop-camper or something along those lines. No, ours is a 35' behemoth that weighs over 8,000 pounds when it is loaded. So, here I am – trailer beginning to slide backwards down the slope, me standing right at the front near the hitch seeing this happening, and what do I do? I grab on to that hitch and start trying to hold it from going down. Think about that! In the end, the thing only moved about 4 inches – once the tire was down off the block the chocks in the wheels held the camper in place and everything was fine. But, just think about what I did in that moment. I was standing at the front of an 8,000 pound trailer about to roll down the hill in front of me, and what did I do? Did I count on the safety measures I had in place to be sure it wouldn't go far? No! Did I grab the cable that was right below me that would have activated the emergency brakes on the trailer? No! No – Marty the Mighty grabs onto the trailer as though I was somehow going to transform into the Incredible Hulk and stop the momentum of this 4 ton trailer rolling down the hill!

It is amazing, to me, the frequency with which we overestimate our capacities and fail to take advantage of the resources available to us in our times of need. It's really no different than the guy driving down the road with a mattress strapped to the roof of the car. You know what I'm talking about (some of you have been that guy) – mattress on the roof, some 300 feet of line strapped around and through the car in every direction imaginable. And still, out the driver's side window is the driver's left hand grabbing onto the mattress as though, should all of that line

fail to hold thing in place, his bionic index finger is somehow going to be able to hold that 100 pound mattress in place as it flaps in the 60mph winds being created as he buzzes down the highway! I'll say it again – It is amazing, to me, the frequency with which we overestimate our capacities and fail to take advantage of the resources available to us in our times of need.

“Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home!” As some of you may have read already in the insert for this morning, Isaac Watts composed this song as a reflection of those very opening words from the 90<sup>th</sup> Psalm that I read a short while ago. “Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.” The Psalmist writes. “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” “Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come!” Such meaningful, profound, heartfelt words of hope and promise that remind us that we get to live our lives enfolded in the constant care, comfort and providence of God – and yet words we so often disregard, ignore, or altogether forget as we dig deeper and deeper into our lives of self-reliance and prideful independency!

The simple truth is that, like the man driving down the road holding the mattress with his bionic figure – and like the absent-minded, 40 year-old, preacher who seems to think he can stop an 8,000 pound trailer from rolling down the hill – we all become far too self-reliant and fiercely independent far too quickly in this life.

- When life throws us off-course, we are convinced that we are the ones who can navigate our way back.
- When life weighs us down, we remain steadfast that we can muster the strength to carry the burdens.
- When life isn't what we know it can be, we know that we are the ones who can find the better path.
- When we hurt, when we fear, when we worry, when we are lost, when we are confused, when we know pain, and sorrow, and despair, and everything else this life can throw our way, we remain committed to our absurd misconceptions that we can, and must, solve the problems on our own.

All the while, each step of the way, God is crying out to us and saying, ‘I am your God – your help throughout the ages. I am your hope for the years that are before you. I am your shelter from the storm and your eternal home!’ All the while, Jesus is calling out, ‘Take my yoke and allow me to help you carry the burden.’ All the while, every comfort we need, every strength we desire, every direction we lack, every courage, peace, hope, wisdom and promise for which we stand wanting is there for the asking if we would only stopping standing in the way as we try to do it all ourselves.

We are stout people. We are confident people. We are intelligent, capable and strong-willed people who remain steadfast in our conviction that we can handle it. Whatever ‘it’ is at the given moment, we know that we are among those that can make it work. But, we are also people of faith. We are people who know the one who promises to be the yoke upon our shoulders. We are people who have felt the touch of God in their lives and know of the help, hope, shelter and home that God promises to be for us. All too often, however, we continue to be the people who allow the former knowledge to get in the way of the latter. We are the people whose assurance

of our own capacities gets in the way of allowing God to fulfill his promises of care in every day of our lives.

We all know that there will be times that life will throw us astray – that things won't go our way. We all know that there will be times when the burdens are deep and pains are real. We all know that there will be moments in which we will have to dig deep for the resources to manage the struggles we face. The question I want you to ask, however, is where you will dig. Because, yes, if you dig deep into the well of your own strength, wisdom and capabilities the answer, at least most often, is yes, you will be able to get through. But, if you dig deep into the hope, the peace and promises of God, that will get you through too. And, at least for me, if I have choice between relying on me and relying on God – I remain pretty convinced that one of those is going to play out a whole lot better than the other!

“Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home!” The promise is real – the only question is, when you need, will you get out of the way and allow God to fulfill it?