

You’ve seen the pictures of refugees huddled on boats crossing the Mediterranean, flooding onto beaches in Greece and Cyprus. You’ve seen them trekking through Turkey, trying to get into Hungary. You’ve seen news reports of children fleeing violence in Central America, riding on top of trains through Mexico and crossing the border seeking asylum in the U.S. These are painful scenes of chaos and confusion that stir in us many conflicting emotions. We are left with the questions: what are we going to do with all these desperate people?

So we can imagine what Moses must have felt like trying to get his swarm of refugees out of Egypt so they could somehow survive in the wilderness. He had no maps, no guidebooks. At this point, he didn’t even have the Ten Commandments. They don’t come for two more chapters. While we don’t know much about the conditions on the ground, we can assume that these former slaves were traumatized. And Moses was left to solve all their problems. He had

to answer all their questions. He had to step into every crisis and settle every dispute.

Now Moses was a great man, but he was only a man, and there was only so much of him. By this point, he was so far beyond his limits that he could no longer see them. Fortunately, for him, his father-in-law, Jethro, could see them.

Sometimes it takes an outsider to help us see the obvious: that we are in way over our heads. While none of us is Moses, we have all been in situations where we are way overextended, stretched to the limit and beyond the limit. Often we've been in that position long enough to forget that we ever had a limit. This can happen at work, in our job of parenting, or in the task of caregiving. It can happen as we struggle with divorce or job loss or chronic illness. In fact, for many of us, this is just daily living.

The thing is that the more overwhelmed we get, the more isolated we become. Even when we are surrounded by people, we can feel very much alone. But often we don't admit it until someone

else notices it. Jethro noticed it and called Moses on it. “What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone...?”

Those are very good questions for all of us, aren't they? Why do we try to carry the burden of doing for others all by ourselves? “People are counting on me,” we say, all the while thinking “but they are killing me.” “No one else can do it,” we boast. But really? No one? OK, who hired you to be God?

Not even Moses was God. And Jethro warns him, “What you are doing is not good.” Maybe Moses could do it when he was younger, but not anymore. Remember when you were in college and you could burn the candle on both ends? Not so easy now. Now we live under the law of diminishing returns. The longer we work the less we get done.

Jethro could see that his son-in-law was wearing himself out. And that was not good. Prophets are like God's lights in the world. So burned-out prophets don't do anyone any good. They just plunge the world into deeper darkness. Jethro spoke a harsh truth: Moses

wasn't helping his people. By wearing himself out, he was wearing them out, too.

Periodically, someone needs to say to us what Jethro said to Moses: "The task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone."

Yesterday, I married Rodrigo and Silvia Abarca and in addition to the vows they made to each other, the guests also made a vow to uphold and care for this couple because no husband and wife can make a marriage work without a lot of support.

Our assistant youth director just went on maternity leave to have her baby. Though Kat will do 100% of the work of bringing him or her into the world, she and CJ cannot raise that child all by themselves. They'll need our help.

I talked to Traci Menicucci on Wednesday. She told me more about what she and Mark are going through as they seek a third opinion to confirm his diagnosis: Parkinson's and ALS. For both of them, there are a whole lot of unknowns, but this she knows: she cannot carry this burden alone. Her friends, family, and most

importantly, her brothers and sisters in Christ will have to carry some of the load for her.

Like millions of other people, I listened to the testimony of Dr. Ford on Thursday. All that day, I was listening to women who needed to talk about the terror of sexual violence. And we all wanted to say to Dr. Ford: We are with you. You don't have to sit there alone.

For those of us who are prone to fall into the Moses trap, we need a Jethro in our lives. Pastor Susan was my Jethro last year, when I was too burned out to see it. When I complained, "I need a break," she put me on the spot, "Then why don't you take one?" I know all the reasons. I personally have used all the excuses for why I have to keep on doing what is not good for me or anyone else. So when I come back from renewal leave telling you that you need some renewal, too, before you tell me why you can't take that kind of time, be assured that I see right through you.

I know that some of you are wearing yourself out, so let me be your Jethro. Except when I say that, you need to know that I am not

necessarily giving you permission to quit your job, your marriage, your kids, your elderly parents, your volunteer commitments. It's not that the work Moses was doing was unimportant. It was very important. It really had to be done. Jethro didn't say "stop doing what you're doing." He said, "Get some help doing it."

I came back from leave thinking that what we are doing here at Willow Glen is really important work. Sometimes we forget how important it is. Like Moses, we are providing—for children, youth and adults—a way through a wilderness, and Silicon Valley is a wilderness in so many ways. We are a family for those who have no family or are a long way from family or would like to be. We are trying and by God's grace sometimes succeeding in letting people know what it's like to be welcomed without conditions and loved without exceptions. And we are committed to twin missions, two very great kingdom projects that give our lives eternal purpose: soul salvation and social transformation.

We are doing God's work. We are Christ's hands and feet on earth, so living our faith isn't just one more thing on our plate. Church is not just one more organization to join or cause to contribute to. Even when we forget it or miss it, we have three of the very best reasons to be here: God is here, Christ is here, the Spirit is here. Not *only* here—God is other places, too—but reliably here. When everything else is going wrong, when everyone else is giving you reasons to doubt that God is real, when the daily news rips you apart and you don't know what can put you back together, when you are tempted to retreat into virtual reality because the so-called real world is taking away your will to live, church says that there is an alternative. It's called the Kingdom of God, and if you want to learn how to live there, you can come here, to church, where you can let go, let down your resistance, put down your burdens and take in the grace.

Why do you sit alone? You are not alone. We are here with you. We will bear the burden with you. Will you bear the burden with us?

None of us can do it alone. None of us can be church all by ourselves. Some try and fall into the Moses trap. I love them but I worry about them. The rest of us can help them. If every one of us would make small investments in this church, measured gifts of our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, our witness, if we would all do our part, no one would have to feel burned out, not here, not anywhere.

Next week, we hope to have our stewardship books ready or almost ready. This year we are making you a magazine of ministry so you can read through it and learn about all the ways that you can help us be church. Not only through your pledge of money but through your commitments to specific ministries that make God and this church attractive spiritual real estate for stressed-out souls in Silicon Valley.

This congregation has had many Moses's in years past. Most of them are gone now. Some of you remember them but more and more of you never met them. But that's okay. If Jethro is right, we

will survive in this wilderness. All we need are some officers of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. We need dreamers, decision-makers, doers, and cheerleaders. We need administrators, teachers, caregivers, listeners. We need musicians, media ministers, fellowship builders and youth mentors. The list goes on. Very simply, we need every one of you.

Part of my burn-out was that when I hit my limit, I began to put limits on God. While hitting my head against a brick wall, I started to doubt what God is able to do at Willow Glen. Five weeks away, visiting other churches, was the best medicine for me, because I came back knowing how good we have it here. So I have decided to practice selective amnesia. From now on, I can't remember all the things that you have said you cannot do. I can't remember all the things that I was sure that God would never do. And I don't recall that there is anything we are not able to do, as long as we do it together.

Jethro told Moses to get help. “They will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace.” My friends, with God’s help and with you help, we can bear the burdens. We will endure. And we’ll make this church a home of grace and peace. Thank you for being here.