

Feb. 5, 2012

Isaiah 40: 21-31

Power and Strength

Once upon a time, there was a little girl. She was a very little girl, smaller than all of her friends. When they all played together, the bigger kids would climb trees and jump up stairs two at a time. But the little girl was too little, so she just sat and watched.

Sometimes the kids would have races---sometimes on their bikes and sometimes running. The little girl's legs were not as long and not as strong as everyone else's, so she always came in last.

One day she was feeling very sad about always being left out and always being last. Her dad saw her sitting alone, quiet and sad. He went and sat down next to her. She leaned over onto his lap and cried just a little bit. He stroked her hair and asked her what was wrong.

She told him, "I'm just too little. I can't keep up. I'm always left behind! I wish I were bigger and stronger!"

Her dad just loved her as they sat together for a few minutes and then he said, "Maybe we should pray together. Do you think that would help?"

The little girl nodded yes.

Her dad began, "Dear God, we know you love us just the way we are, but sometimes we wish we were different. It's too hard to be little.

We want to be bigger and stronger and faster so we can have more fun and be more like our friends. Help us to grow and get stronger. Help us find a way to have fun even when we are the littlest one! Amen!"

And then he started singing and the little girl sang along---

"Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so!

Little ones to him belong.

They are weak, but he is strong!

Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!

Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so!”

And then her daddy said,

“There’s another way I know that Jesus loves me---not just because the Bible says so, and not because the pastor says so, either! I know Jesus loves me because I can feel it in my heart! Think about it! I know you love me because I feel it in my heart! I know Jesus loves me the same way!

So we can sing the song with the words a little bit different! Instead of singing ‘The Bible tells me so!’ we can say

“My heart knows that it’s so.”

And “Jesus loves me this I know! In my heart I know it’s so!”

Grown-ups belong to Jesus, too, so we can sing

“All of us to him belong! We are weak, but he is strong!”

Sing with me---

“Jesus loves me, this I know! In my heart I know it’s so!

All of us to him belong! We are weak, but he is strong!

Yes, Jesus loves me! (3x)

My heart knows that it's so!"

By the end of the song the little girl was smiling up at her big, strong daddy.

As he looked back at her, he suddenly got an idea! He knew that God had given the idea to him!

He smiled a big, big smile back at her and asked,

"Where are the other kids right now?"

She told him, "In the park. I think they're playing ball and no one ever wants me on their team because I'm too little!"

She started to feel sad again. Her dad picked her up and started running toward the park with her in his big, strong arms!

That made her giggle, and the more he ran, the harder she laughed.

She was really too big to be carried. She wasn't a baby any more! But her dad was big and strong and it made her feel safe and somehow strong too, to be carried by him!

By the time they got to the park he had flipped her up over his head and she was riding piggy-back on his shoulders!

They ran right up to home plate and her dad reached for a bat.

The kids started hooting and hollering!

How was he going to bat with a little girl on his shoulders??

The biggest boy was pitching, and he stood stock-still and stared. How was he supposed to pitch to a grown-up? He shouldn't be playing!! This was a kids' game! Then one of the big girls said, "Let them try! It will be fun!"

And the dad said, "Give me your best pitch!"

So he did, and the dad hit it so well that the centerfielder had to chase it down! The dad ran the bases with his little girl on his shoulders, and again she laughed.

And all of her friends laughed, too! Everyone was having fun together and no one was telling the little girl she wasn't big enough or strong enough to play any more!

From then on, whenever her dad was home, he played with the kids. He helped his little girl get up in the tree when they climbed. He carried her piggyback when they ran races. He cheered her on when they rode bikes.

And a funny thing happened----actually a couple of funny things happened!

The first funny thing was that when her dad wasn't there, the bigger kids started helping her to hit the baseball. They also gave her a boost when they climbed the tree, and they shouted encouragement to her when they rode bikes.

In other words, they started imitating her dad.

The second funny thing that happened was that the other smaller kids, who were still bigger than the little girl, saw the bigger kids riding next to her and cheering her on, and they slowed down so she could keep up.

Their races became less about being first and more about just running together and making sure that everyone had fun!

It didn't take too many weeks before the little girl was having so much fun without him that her dad didn't need to come and help her any more.

But she still liked it when he did, because she loved him, and he loved her! And there were many times when she went to sit next to him and sing,

"Jesus loves me, this I know! In my heart I know it's so!

All of us to God belong! We are weak but God is strong!

Yes, Jesus loves me! (3x)

My heart knows that it's so!"

She never forgot that whenever she felt little and small, being with her big, strong dad made her feel strong and big and most of all, loved!

We spend a lot of energy trying to be strong, trying to do everything on our own, trying to keep other people from thinking we're weak. We don't want to ask for help or admit that we can't do certain things.

But Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" ----in other words, "I will help you do what you need to do!"

And Isaiah told us that God never gets tired or weary, that he strengthens those who are weak and tired. He says that those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed, just like the little girl felt stronger when she trusted her dad to take care of her.

Isaiah says it very poetically----that those who trust in the Lord for help, who lean on God's strength will "rise up on wings like eagles! They will run and not get tired! They will walk and not grow weak!"

God's strength can fill us up and help us to do what we need to do, whether it's keeping up with others who are stronger and bigger and more experienced than we are, or being more than we ever thought we could be, or doing what's right even when others look down on us for being weak.

All we have to do is trust in God's strength to be enough---to stop relying on our own physical, human strength and start believing that God's strength is more than enough for each one of us!

All we have to do is to go sit with Jesus and let him love us, let him help us, and pretty soon we won't feel weak any more. Instead, we will feel big and strong, depending on Jesus, who is big and strong.

And then funny things will happen. Other people will see Jesus' example-----WE will see Jesus' example---- and instead of making other people feel small and weak by leaving them behind and criticizing them and telling them all the things that they CANNOT do, we will help each other be more than we can be by ourselves.

We can slow down, we can stop excluding others, we can give each other a hand or a boost, we can stop competing to be the best or first or the richest or the smartest and instead just be

kind, compassionate, loving

Christ-like!

We can let God be God----strong and powerful! And WE can just be HUMAN!!! And weak as humans are. Imperfect as humans are. Dependent on God, as humans are.

We can drop all the things that divide us and instead we can be the Body of Christ together---

Young and old, weak and strong, big and little----all living together in
the light of Christ,

and drawing our strength from Christ alone!

“Jesus loves me, this I know! In my heart I know it’s so!

All of us to him belong! We are weak, but he is strong!

Yes, Jesus loves me! (3x)

My heart knows that it’s so!”

Let’s pray together----

Loving God, we know in our hearts that Jesus loves us. Help us to
remember that when we admit that we are weak, your strength comes
through us, helping us, carrying us, making us more than we can be alone.
Teach us to rely on you all the time. We cannot depend on our own
strength, so help us to lean on yours. Thank you for loving us. Thank you
for being strong for us. In Jesus’ name, Amen!