

TEXT: Isaiah 41:10

THEME: PASTOR STARR—YOU HAVE A HELPER

**So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)** <sup>NIV84</sup>

Dear Pastor Starr, my brother in the ministry and my son, dear daughter-in-law Anne, Evelyn, Isla, family, friends, and members of Mighty Fortress Lutheran Church:

*Aller Anfang ist Schwer.* That's how Pastor Starr began his sermon when he preached for my 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the ministry service last September. *Aller Anfang ist Schwer.* That's a German proverb that means: Every beginning is hard. I figure if he could make that proverb work for my 40<sup>th</sup>, it can certainly serve us today as Pastor Starr and you begin your ministry together here at Mighty Fortress Lutheran Church. Every beginning is hard.

Your beginning, your birth in Brazil, was a difficult delivery, but was helped by a doctor trained at the University of Michigan. You will soon discover that your new pastor is a huge Wolverines fan, but I'm sure he'll also be following the Bulldogs. You were born with an independent streak. As you built things with your Duplos or Lincoln Logs, you would proudly show us your work and proclaim, "I did it all by myselfer!" You studied hard and graduated as the Salutatorian of your class at Michigan Lutheran Seminary. You became a national Latin scholar. Those were things you did—all by yourselfer—with the help of your professors. But you also learned teamwork, taking 4<sup>th</sup> in the state track finals on a relay team, in which you had to do your best, but also depended on three other young men to do their best. I've often been asked where Pastor Starr got all his speed as a sprinter. I've always replied, "From me!" "From you?" they ask surprised. "Yes," I say, "I didn't use any of it so I gave it all to him."

The Lord brought your beautiful and talented wife, Anne, into your life. You were born in Brazil; she was born in Malawi—both children of world missionaries. You both grew up in parsonages; you both know what parish ministry is all about. You will not be serving at Mighty Fortress Lutheran Church all by yourselfer. God has given you a helper, a teacher with a Master's Degree, who loves our Lord and Savior, her family, children, people, and you. Anne is your God-given helper in life and ministry, and I know from personal experience how important and wonderful that is.

You have been serving as an admissions counselor at Martin Luther College. You have met individually with hundreds of young men and women to encourage them to serve in fulltime ministry. After a full day of such meetings, I've seen you sit at our dining room table handwriting notes to those young people late into the evening. You did that all by yourselfer. But you've also been working on a team of recruiters and support personnel. You've needed to work together to achieve your common goal. Now you are the one called pastor of Mighty Fortress Lutheran Church. You are the overseer and spiritual leader of this family of believers. You are responsible for the souls and spiritual wellbeing of the members of this congregation. God has not given that responsibility to anyone else. This is a new beginning for you; you've not had this responsibility before. *Aller Anfang ist*

*Schwer!* Every beginning is hard. But the Lord has trained you for this and he has given you help. You have your fellow pastors in your circuit. Listen and learn from them; it is an impressive list of fellow servants of our Savior. Plus, you've already worked with your circuit pastor, Pastor Lewis, as a high school student on a Project Titus trip from Michigan Lutheran Seminary. What a special blessing that the two of you can now serve together as brothers in the ministry in the same circuit!

You are not doing the ministry of the gospel all by yourself here at Mighty Fortress Lutheran Church. God has brought together almost 250 gifted, talented people in this congregation to bring him glory, to serve one another, and to reach out to the unbelievers in this community. They represent a multitude of talents for you and your church leaders to bring together in a comprehensive and long range ministry plan in which not just one man—you—do the work, but all of you work together, **“As long as it is day,...Night is coming, when no one can work” (John 9:4)**. There is urgency in this work. The devil has been successful in polluting so many social norms that once followed Christian principles, but no longer do: the lie of evolution, living together without marriage, abortion, homosexuality, no respect for God's representatives in the home, government, or church, and so on. I've seen this happen in the last four decades; I wonder what you will need to deal with in your ministry.

I wonder about it, but I'm not worried for you, your family, or your church. Why? Because we have the promise of our great God: **So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.** Yes, every beginning is hard, but don't be afraid, don't be dismayed, because your God is with you.

The almighty creator of the universe strengthens you for the work he gives you to do. He does that through daily study of his Word. No matter how busy you get, take time to be personally in God's Word. There and only there you will find true strength and wisdom for the tasks God puts in front of you.

Then, when your strength is no longer sufficient for the labor you must do, when you can no longer do it by yourself, God says, **“I will...help you.”** He comes alongside you to help carry the burden, to guide you down the right path, to be the wind under your wings so that you can soar in your service to him.

Finally, when all your strength is sapped, when you can no longer even reach out your hand for his help, he promises, **“I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”** He picks you up and carries you along in his righteousness—the forgiveness of your sins, the sins of your family, the sins of your congregation. All is right between God and you only because Jesus purchased an eternity in heaven for us with his blood. Believing, hoping, trusting that promise is what this whole ministry thing is all about. May God bless your years of ministry as you faithfully hold onto that promise, and proclaim and show it to all those around you. You have many helpers to assist you in that and they are a tremendous blessing, but Pastor Starr—you have the one Helper who makes all the difference and everything worthwhile, our Savior-God himself. Amen.

—Pastor Richard D. Starr, dad