

Sermon for Zion, September 1, 2019

Hymns: 378 – Jesus In The Morning; 489 – Help Us To Help Each Other Lord;  
“Help!”; 635 - Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You

Scripture: Exodus 18:13-18; Matthew 4:18-22

Sermon Title: “Help! I need somebody!”

*(Exodus 18:13-18 NIV) The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?" Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws." Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.*

*(Matthew 4:18-22 NIV) As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

When I was younger, so much younger than today  
I never needed anybody's help in any way  
But now these days are gone, I'm not so self-assured  
Now I find I've changed my mind and opened up the doors

And now my life has changed in oh so many ways  
My independence seems to vanish in the haze  
But every now and then I feel so insecure  
I know that I just need you like I've never done before

Help me if you can, I'm feeling down And I do appreciate you being round  
Help me get my feet back on the ground  
Won't you please, please help me! Help Me, help me!

(Lennon and McCartney 1965)

There was a wonderful movie out this summer about a fellow who wakes up in a world where “The Beatles” didn’t exist, but somehow he knows all the Beatles songs. He becomes a superstar, but is awaiting the day when he’s found out – when everyone wakes up remembering just who John Lennon and Paul McCartney are.

As a result of this film, I’ve been humming a lot of the Beatles’ back catalogue, and when I started in on “Help!” I realised it belongs in our hymnbook as much as any other song that’s in there. Because we all need help. And helping is a primary Christian virtue.

After all, everyone needs help. Everyone needs a hand. Even cranky, prickly, stubborn, opinionated St. Paul. Paul never went it alone, but always brought with him someone to share the road. Barnabas, Silas, John Mark, Timothy, and many more. I suppose that’s why, when he was setting out the list of important gifts to share in the life and work of the church, he put them in this order (1 Corinthians 12:28 NIV):

*And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others...*

Any Apostles here? Prophets? Teachers? Miracle workers? All right, how about gifts of healing? A few of those, maybe? I guess that leaves the rest of us in this category: “*those able to help others.*” That’s the rest of us. The most of us. *And in the church God has appointed... those able to help others.* That’s you and me. That’s our job here in church. We’re the ones able to help others. We are called to help others. Which is a good thing, because none of us can go it alone. All of us need help. All of us need a hand. And all of us can be of help to another.

I’m sure I mentioned to you before a good friend of ours, named Cathy. We were thanking her for a wonderful thing she had done for us a number of years ago, which was a tremendous help to us, and she didn’t want to hear our thanks. “Don’t say another thing,” she said; “Helping other people is the only thing that makes me happy.” And that struck me as one of the most deeply Christian things I have ever heard in my life. And I know it came from her heart. “*Helping other people is the only thing that makes me happy.*”

Imagine a world in which helping other people was the only true source of our happiness. Not things; not entertainment; not personal power or privilege or money or the rest: helping other people. The Bible imagines such a world. And it imagines it from beginning to end. In fact, our need for help and our need to help other is, the Bible says, built right into us. Right from the very beginning.

God creates Adam. He places him in a garden, in a world, perfectly suited to him. He gives Adam the task of developing a language, of naming all the things in creation. Adam encounters all the birds of the air, all the beasts of the field. But, we are told, *“For Adam, no suitable helper was found.”* Then the LORD God said, *“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”* (Genesis 2:18, 2;20 NRSV) For a true companion, for a true relationship, Adam needed a helper.

*“A helper as his partner.”* A helper. Interesting choice of words, no? It may be helpful for you to know that the Hebrew word for Helper, *“Ezer,”* doesn’t mean “subordinate” or “servant” or “underling” or “slave.” It means Helper, in the sense of the kind of helper you need when you’re unable to get through on your own, when you can’t imagine making it without that person pushing you, pulling you, lifting you up, supporting you, carrying you, sharing the load, taking you by the hand, and not letting go. That’s what *“Ezer”* means. That’s what a Helper is. That’s what God saw that Adam needed. Somehow, God saw that Adam couldn’t go it alone. *“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”* From the very beginning, it seems, everyone needs a partner. No one can go it alone. Everyone needs a helper. Everyone needs a hand.

Moses is swamped. He’s beginning to realise that he has bitten off more than he can chew, that being the leader of this group of people, inspiring them, guiding them, hearing their complaints, working through their problems, facing difficulties as they arise, bringing them from where they’ve been to where they need to be, is taking everything he’s got and more. Finally, flummoxed and frazzled and frayed, he realizes he just can’t do it alone. His father-in-law, having watched from afar, now offers some advice (Exodus 18:17-18 NIV):

*“What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.”*

This is Moses we are talking about here; Moses, who stood before the burning bush, who heard the voice of God, who received the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone; Moses, who stood before Pharaoh, before the most powerful person in the known world, before the master of millions, and said, “Let my people go!” Moses, who brought his people to the shores of the Red Sea, who raised his staff and parted the waters, whose faith and strength and determination took a nation of slaves and led them from captivity to freedom: this is Moses we’re talking about here.

And his father-in-law looks him in the eye and says, *"What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone."* No one can go it alone. Even Moses needed a helper. Even Moses needed a hand.

Jesus is walking the shores of Galilee. He is thirty years old; the hand of God is upon him. He has laid down the tools of his step-father's trade, he has moved out from under the family roof, he has, at the hands of his cousin, been baptised in the Jordan; he has, at the prompting of the Spirit, spent his forty days in the wilderness, and he now returns, refined and tempered, ready for the task ahead. And what's the first thing, the very first thing, he does? Listen (Matthew 4:18-22 NLT):

*One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" And they left their nets at once and followed him.*

*A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind. Then Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News.*

Surely Jesus doesn't need help – right? Surely, Jesus could do all he needed to do, say all he needed to say, heal all he needed to heal, all on his own – right? So why then surround himself with these four fishermen? And, in days and weeks and months to come, with many others besides? Could it be that even Jesus couldn't go it alone? Could it be that even Jesus needed some helpers? Could it be that even Jesus – Jesus, mind you – needed a hand?

From village to village, from town to town, from lakeshore to riverbank to the Jericho road, from the shadow of Mount Hermon through the depths of the Jordan valley, from the sleepy towns of Galilee to the long climb up to Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples – Jesus and his coworkers – Jesus and his helpers – preached the Good News in word and in deed. They were entirely self-sufficient, these thirteen men, able to withstand any storm and provide for any contingency. But were they? Maybe this question never occurred to you before, but where did they get the resources to provide for food, for clothing, for a fresh pair of sandals? Well, listen to this (Luke 8:1-3 NIV):

*After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women... Mary (called Magdalene); ...Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*

Inevitably, behind every good man – or group of men – there's a good woman. Or group of women. Jesus and the disciples – Jesus and the famous twelve – Jesus and his faithful band of brothers whose works and words would change the world – couldn't go it alone. Needed the help of some good women. Needed a hand.

Now turn your eyes to the Mount of Olives. The Resurrected Jesus is ascending out of sight, the small remaining band of followers looking up in distress. The Sunday time of their Resurrection Celebration is over, the forty days with Jesus alive again is at an end. Now is the Monday time, the time where they have to take the faith put there by Jesus and see how it works in the world. So what do they do?

*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (Acts 1:12-14 NIV)*

They went to Jerusalem – together. They stayed in the upper room – together. They prayed for and encouraged each other – together. They experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit – together. They see tens and hundreds and, praise God, thousands come to a knowledge of Jesus as Saviour and Lord – together. And then we read this (Acts 2:42-47 NIV):

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

Did you ever notice before that they devoted themselves to teaching **and to fellowship**? To being together? They were devoted to being with, to helping, to spending time with one another. They devoted themselves to visiting one another, sharing meals together, thanking God together. Of course. Because within that early

Church they knew, as Jesus himself taught them, that no-one is meant to go it alone; that everyone needs a helper; that everyone needs a hand. And when those outside that close-knit community of mutual help and support saw what was going on, well, they wanted in too. Who wouldn't? Who doesn't need a helper? Who doesn't need a hand? Small wonder the Apostle Paul lists "helping" as one of our primary spiritual tasks.

Adam, Moses, Jesus, the Disciples, the Early Christians, the Apostle Paul: they had this in common with one another, and with me and you. They couldn't go it alone. They needed help. They needed a hand. And Zion Presbyterian Church is no different. We need one another. If our church is to thrive, we need one another's help. I certainly can't do it all. Moses couldn't, Jesus couldn't, the disciples couldn't, Paul couldn't, and I'm not even the faintest possible shadow of any of that esteemed list. Over the last number of years, I'm coming to realise that I am far less capable, less competent, less energetic and healthy and indestructible than I thought. Together with the Beatles, I sing, "Help! I need somebody!" And you need somebody too. We all need a helper. We all need to help. We all need a hand. We need you.

What are you doing? Where can you participate? Where can you lend a hand? Will it be with the Sunday School? With Alpha? With a Men's or Women's Breakfast? With a community event? A church dinner? A Missions group? A nursing home visit? There are so many ways to get involved, so many ways to help. This year, make the effort to find a place where you can help; find others with whom you can help together. Be a helper. Be a helping hand. Find your joy through helping others. I think – *I know* - you'll find yourself blessed, and helped, and lifted up to God as you do.

*"Helping other people is the only thing that makes me happy."* Imagine a world in which helping other people was the only true source of our happiness. Not things; not entertainment; not personal power or privilege or money or the rest: helping other people. The Bible imagines such a world. And it calls that world, "The Church." Let's help each other be that church.

Amen.