

Aldersgate United Methodist Church
Sunday, September 21, 2025
“Helpers Abound”

Pastor Sue McNicol

Scripture Reading: Psalm 113 - New Revised Standard Version

Praise the Lord!

Praise, O servants of the Lord;
praise the name of the Lord.

² Blessed be the name of the Lord
from this time on and forevermore.

³ From the rising of the sun to its setting,
the name of the Lord is to be praised.

⁴ The Lord is high above all nations
and his glory above the heavens.

⁵ Who is like the Lord our God,
who is seated on high,

⁶ who looks far down
on the heavens and the earth?

⁷ He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,

⁸ to make them sit with princes,
with the princes of his people.

⁹ He gives the barren woman a home,
making her the joyous mother of children.

Praise the Lord!

I want to tell you a story...a friend from St. Paul's UMC shared with my companion something that took place at her house last week. For the sake of sharing publicly, we'll call this mutual friend of ours "Alice." Alice was awakened early Monday morning when there was a knock at her front door, then repeated doorbell ringing, and more insistent knocking. She peeked out the kitchen window to discover a police officer on her front step. When she opened the door, he shared that he was there to perform a welfare check – to ensure she was okay...safe. "Of course, I'm fine," she said. "Why are you checking on me?" He went on to explain that her next-door neighbor had observed a vehicle stop in the middle of the street, in the wee hours of the morning, and a man dashed up to Alice's front door. Shortly after, he ran back to his vehicle and sped away. The neighbor thought it was odd and wanted to make sure Alice was okay, and at the same

time not put herself at risk – also a single woman, senior citizen, living alone – SO, she called the police and asked them to check on Alice. Well, Alice started to giggle and pointed to the corner of her front porch. She proceeded to explain to the officer that the early morning visitor was her milk delivery person, and there on the porch stood her fresh jugs of 2% milk. (Who knew there is still such a thing as a “milkman” in this day and age.). The officer started chuckling too, and at that point asked if he might be of assistance and help carry her delivery into the house for her.

Our reading for this Sunday, Psalm 113, is subtitled “God, the helper of the needy.” It’s the first of two praise psalms which are sung before the Jewish Passover meal – and repeats three times the imperative call to praise, followed by a shift to bless God now and forevermore. The psalm then explores God’s activity high above all else, and the Lord looking far down to those in need on earth. It sounds to me like there are several degrees of separation by the way the verses are structured (high above -far below). But then we hear that God “raises” the ones in need, as though God is exchanging some part of God’s nature and character with the humans that God is saving. It feels a little like the milkman scenario (watchful neighbor, needy Alice, God in uniform?) Who’s experiencing what, who needs saving, and how does that all take place, given what one may or may not have witnessed or felt, or needed at the moment?

It's an excellent illustration of how God “enters in” and how we invite God’s help and God’s earthly helpers (all of us) to serve as God’s hands and feet (and sometimes watchful eyes). This particular psalm reminds us that God is dynamic with an active presence in this world and not just “above” or “separated from” those in need, here and now. I like to think God watches over me the way that kind and loving neighbor felt tugged to reach out and offer assistance to Alice. Sometimes a person in need is able to clearly articulate how time, or resources, or support might be beneficial. But sometimes, it’s difficult to know how to support someone else, or whether our assistance is welcome. I love this succinct instruction found in Romans 12:13-16, the New Living Translation:

¹³ When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all!

This interpretation of these four verses in Romans provides an interesting roadmap for human engagement in our time. I realize we have over 450 versions of the Bible in English alone and attempts to translate involve interpretation far beyond Greek and Hebrew vocabulary. Translators make choices on how to interpret manuscripts on various levels. And thanks to those interpretations, we have numerous opportunities to hear biblical messages which speak to our current time and our individual journeys as developing Christians. So, when I hear Paul’s letter to the Roman’s instructing them as believers to bless others, share in the happiness or weeping

with others, live in harmony and enjoy the company of ordinary people. I'm grateful for this instruction centuries ago and still today – and I'm grateful for translations and interpretations which speak directly to my heart. Lastly, I love the line, “and don't think you know it all.” I'd like to add, “and don't think you have to know it all to be part of God's plan.”

In 2007 I had an opportunity to serve on an UMVIM (United Methodist Volunteers in Mission) team. We were a team of folks from UMC churches in South Central Montana that ventured to New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. While we were there...and mind you, most of us knew absolutely nothing about construction or home building...we assisted with refurbishing two family homes. We put in some long hours cleaning, putting up drywall, taping drywall, sanding and painting. While we were “helpers” we certainly weren't “heroes.” The real heroes emerged from all corners of the neighborhood. And one of those superheroes was named Reggie. One day midweek, Reggie – who lived next door to the house we were fixing – asked if he could bring us a little midday surprise. We gladly agreed – and at 12 o'clock sharp, out his front door popped Reggie, carrying plates of homemade jambalaya and glasses of Kool-Aid. Reggie, who had been dealt an equally harsh blow by the hurricane, was hell-bent on letting us know we were loved and appreciated. It's one of the most memorable meals of my life – the jambalaya was amazing, but the smile on Reggie's face goes beyond description. It's a God moment permanently embedded in my heart.

Charles Dickens said, “*No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another.*” We as United Methodists are committed to acts of service to lighten the burden of others. On a global scale, in 2024 UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) distributed \$37.6 million in humanitarian relief, implemented 187 emergency and solidarity grants, and assisted survivors in 137 global crises (extreme weather events, floods, earthquakes, public health emergencies and migration events).

And over just the past few weeks, Aldersgate UMC has offered two families love and support through funeral reception luncheons – the flow of homemade salads and desserts through this building has been mind-boggling. We've received HEAPS of donated items to sell during our annual rummage sale and raised over \$2700 to assist with upkeep of our facility. We've extended support to community members through our involvement at the Butte Attack on Hunger alongside our UMC friends from Dillon, and we've had members continue with their outpouring of support and friendship to those who are homebound or in need of special nurture. Not a day goes by that I'm not in awe of the positive energy and tireless service that's poured out by members of this community and the church I serve alongside in Dillon.

I love how Mother Teresa described the heart of a helper - “*It is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the doing. It is not how much we give, but how much love is put in the giving.*” There is an abundance of love flowing through our faith communities, and so much of God's grace in the hearts of our congregants.

Fall is the time of year we re-commit to our model of church organization and develop plans for the year ahead. One part of this process involves organizing our administrative and programmatic responsibilities and working with individuals on various committees and teams – a mix of individuals currently serving and new folks interested in becoming involved and learning these roles. Some of the committees I’m referring to are our church council, a committee on pastor-parish relations, a board of trustees, a committee on finance and more. If you are interested in becoming involved in our faith community in this fashion, please let me know. I can also connect you with our lay leaders who can tell you more and help answer questions.

Helpers come in all shapes and sizes – caring neighbors, willing volunteers, grateful friends, considerate public servants, tender-loving children...and on and on. Let’s just take a minute to breathe deeply and honor this sacred day of rest with thankful hearts. We can’t do it all, or be all things to all people, but we can be God’s representatives here on earth by simply living as people of faith – trusting that we will serve others, and at times, be served by others as the mystery of life unfolds. Let’s live today as people of praise, awe and appreciation. Amen.