

## God's Purpose for Humanity

**Genesis 2:18-23**  
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**First Presbyterian Church**  
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In the novel "City of Peace," a pastor named Harley Camden makes a discovery about the power of community. He's preaching the day after a rock was thrown through the window of a local bakery owned by an immigrant family. "Here is what I challenge us to do today," he said. "After worship, let's walk as a group to the Riverview Bakery. Let's walk as one body, as the body of Christ, as the physical presence of our Lord.... Let's line up and support this business as a manifestation of the Spirit, as an act that shows the reality of our love." During the closing hymn, the pastor felt strongly that he was being led by the Spirit of God. When he gathered with the congregation in the parking lot after worship, he was shocked by the number of people there. Out of a hundred people in worship, 75 were ready to march in support of that bakery.

Seventy-five people marching as one in support of a business owned by a family of immigrants, immigrants who were attacked in an act of hate. What is it that brings people together like that? The answer is relationship, partnership. In today's Old Testament lesson from the Book of Genesis, God forms the first ever partnership in all of creation.

Earlier in Genesis, it says "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." (Genesis 1:31) And yet, we read in Genesis today that God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." Then God caused the man to sleep, did a little divine surgery to extract a rib, and used that rib to create a woman as the man's partner. Two beings who are different from one another and yet equal partners in the eyes of God. Now, if anyone doubts the equality of women and men, the meaning of the Hebrew word for "helper" lays aside all doubt.

In Hebrew, the word "helper," or ezer as it's pronounced, has nothing to do with subservience or rank. In fact, the word ezer is most often used to describe God as being a helper to human beings. Such a helper is always strong, working to save and to rescue.

In the bible, the word is used twice to describe women, three times in reference to military support, and 16 times to describe God. So, men, God seems to be saying to us -about women- here is your savior and your rescuer. And thanks be to God, for that; am I right? You husbands out there, you better say I'm right, if you know what's good for you – that women are in many ways our saviors and rescuers.

But seriously, that makes sense. There's not one of us here today or anywhere on earth who can get through life all alone. So clearly, God created us for community, for relationship, with the intent that we help and support each other.

If you were to give humankind a grade on how well we are doing helping and supporting each other, what grade would you give? It's OK; shout it out. Yeah; I didn't hear any A+ out there. Not even an A. The truth is humanity gets a poor grade when it comes to helping and supporting one another. And that's sad.

So today, in the first of a three-part sermon series, we're going to look at just why it's so important that we view each other – not as adversaries – but as helpers, as partners. Let's take the church as an example. Today is Homecoming Sunday, when we kick off a new program year of ministry, spiritual growth and learning, fun and fellowship, and, of course, food. For us to do all this as a church, we need to view each other as partners in ministry. And the neat thing is, your role in the ministry of this church – no matter how active you are – your place in the life of this church is a reflection of who you are, a reflection of who God created you to be.

God created you to be a helper and a partner – here at church, in your family, at your school or workplace, in your neighborhood and out in the community. Such a spirit of helpfulness and partnership is a gift from God, a gift of creation.

Who are you a helper for? With whom do you partner? Husbands and wives are partners, aren't they? Brothers and sisters are partners. Even parents and children, aunts and uncles are partners. Employees and bosses, citizens and police, government officials and the people they serve, church members and staff – we all partner with one another for the greater good, or at least we should. And yet, when it comes to giving society a grade on how well we do at helping and supporting each other, we know we fall way short of the mark. Something needs to change.

We seem to be trapped in an "I win/you lose" mindset, when the truth is "I win" can and often does mean that "we lose." In other words, unless everyone has a chance to do their part and enjoy the benefits of working together for the common good, then society suffers.

To turn this around, we need to go back to the beginning; we need to remind ourselves what life is all about. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and he created us as partners with God in taking care of all creation.

The No. 1 partnership we need to focus on each day is our partnership with God and what that means for us as partners with one another. And the best place to do that, by and large, is in the church, in the life of the church.

Church is where we learn to work alongside people of varying backgrounds, beliefs, tastes and desires. There's no screening tool for those who join a church, like there is with a job. There's no requirement that you be here, like there is with school. No.

Church is the one place you come solely because God calls you into partnership with him, and through him, in partnership with one another.

And because you don't have to be here, because anyone who wants to can be here, because anyone who wants to be of service here is welcome to join in ministry, this is the one place we truly learn to be partners, partners who accept each other no matter our differences and appreciate each other because of other varying gifts and talents and perspectives. That is how God envisions things.

And yet, I think that last part about different perspectives deserves special attention today. I have no doubt that you know someone here or elsewhere in your life who has a completely different perspective on things, whatever that thing may be that comes to mind for you – politics, lifestyle, fashion sense, priorities in life, the list goes on and on.

And I know that we all struggle these days to make room for another person's view of things. Intolerance seems to be a national epidemic if not a global pandemic. And yet, we don't have to be infected with it; we don't have to suffer from it.

We can keep ourselves safe from intolerance and divisiveness by remembering who we are, who God created us to be – helpers to one another and partners with God in making this world all that it can be, all that God intends it to be.

So, the next time you feel critical of someone, the next time you feel baffled by another person's words or actions or choices, remember that that person is a partner in life, and he or she deserves the same respect and understanding as you.

You don't have to like them. You don't have to agree with them. You just have to love them, love them as someone formed by God just like you, not perfect, but none the less, useful in God's plan and purpose, and beloved in God's eyes. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

God of life, once more you have called us together for worship. We have come to be refreshed. We have come to be reminded of whose we are. We have come to explore who you are calling us to be in the world.

God of light, in this time together, open our eyes, our hearts and our very beings to see, hear and feel how you are active in us and among us.

God of love, who calls us to live lives of love, may the time we spend listening for your still, small voice awaken an awareness of how we can put love into action, how we can care for all our relationships.

We take this time, especially, to lift up to your care those who are in need of your healing touch and comforting presence, and especially those who grieve the loss of a loved one. We join our hearts with those in a period of national mourning, on the death of Queen Elizabeth, and even more so, those of us in this country marking the anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. We pray for those dealing with illness, disease and limited physical mobility.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus the Christ, who brings us into relationship with you in new and wonderful ways, and who taught us to pray as one body, the church, saying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**