

“Chosen”

Genesis 2:18-25

It is not good that a person should be alone. In the church we have ministry groups because we can accomplish so much more in groups that we can accomplish alone. Our ministry groups have been presenting to our new member classes these last 3 weeks so that our new members can hopefully find a group they want to be a part of.

Sometimes we form new groups so we can serve more people. After our arrival here in June of 2003, we decided to start a contemporary worship service with a new band. We began very small with Chad playing the guitar, our then music director, Sherri, playing the keyboard and singing along with my wife Danette and daughter Rachel singing. They played from the front of our sanctuary.

Paul Klemme Sr., and a group of helpers tore out the pews and engineered a flat floor on top of our sloped floor to make room for our growing band. The space quickly filled with Chad and Rick playing the guitar, several high school youths then the old guys, Dave and Don playing the drums, Steve playing keyboards, and many vocalists over the years now anchored by Tricia and Ian.

Early on, the band was named “Chosen” based on Colossians 3:12 . . . “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience”.

Being a member of any ministry group, especially Chosen, teaches us that God created us for community to help and support one another so we don’t have to face the challenges of life alone.

Tricia defines that community when she tells me that everyone in Chosen contributes, everyone shares their own gifts and ideas about a song. While directing Chosen, she's learned a lot about herself as a musician and how to better experience the music. She's learned to be more confident and to not worry about perfection. Plus, it gives her the opportunity to sing with Ian, "who is a great help and loves doing it".

Chosen has discovered a foundational biblical truth: "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). In the garden of Eden, God realizes that the first man will not be able to thrive on his own, so God decides to "make him a helper as his partner" (v. 18).

First, God creates animals of the field and birds of the air, but none of these creatures is found to be a suitable helper and partner. Then God causes a deep sleep to fall on the man, removes one of his ribs, and forms a woman to be his helper and partner. The man wakes up and says, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (v. 23).

The two are made equally in the image and likeness of God, and the term "helper" is in no way intended to communicate subservience. In fact, the Hebrew word for helper, *ezer*, is most often used to describe God as being a helper of 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.

When the woman is created to be a helper and a partner to the man, she is not made to be a second-class citizen. Quite the opposite. God seems to be saying in this verse, "Man, here is your savior and your rescuer!"

Clearly, God has created us for community, to help and support each other so that we do not face the challenges of life alone. Each of us is a creation of God, equally made in the image and likeness of God, with more in common than we think.

What does it mean to make our church and community a place in which we help and support one another so we don't have to face the challenges of life alone?

- **Be true helpers, saving and rescuing each other.** In the Christian community, we are supposed to be strong and bold, not weak, and timid, in our support for one another. “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ,” says the apostle Paul to the Galatians. “So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (Galatians 6:2, 10).
- **Bear one another’s burdens.** We do this when we offer a listening ear ... provide a ride to a medical appointment ... give an afternoon of childcare ... pay a month’s rent or a utility bill for a family in need through our discretionary fund.
- **Work for the good of all.** This means working to expand the stock of affordable housing in the community ... by renovating old houses through LMM or Habitat for Humanity.
- **Especially for those of the family of faith.** We show this focus when we make sure that children are welcomed fully in worship ... when we create small groups for every member of the congregation, even those with special needs ... when we provide tangible help to church members facing financial difficulties, marital problems, and illnesses in body, mind, or spirit.

Each of us is challenged to answer the question posed by James, the brother of Jesus: “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?” Great question. The answer, of course, is, “It’s no good.” James concludes by saying, “So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:15-17).

We are true helpers when we do the work of saving and rescuing, boldly bearing one another’s burdens, and supplying the bodily needs of our brothers and sisters.

Once we engage in this kind of helping, we become *full partners* with one another. Together, we are so much stronger than we are as isolated individuals. As Paul says to the Corinthians, “we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). This one Spirit-filled body is made up of many members, acting as full partners.

In the novel *City of Peace*, a Methodist pastor named Harley Camden makes a discovery about the power of community after a rock is thrown through the window of a local bakery owned by Muslim immigrants.

“Here is what I challenge us to do today,” he said to his congregation in his Sunday sermon. “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 in the world today. Let’s line up and support this business as a manifestation of the Spirit, as an act that shows the reality of our love.”

Looking out over the congregation during the closing hymn, Harley felt strongly that he was being led by the Spirit of God, with the support of a large number of his church members.

In fact, when he gathered with the congregation in the parking lot after the service, he was shocked by the number of people who were interested in walking to the Riverview Bakery. There had been close to a hundred people in worship, and Harley guessed that about 75 were ready to march.

The members of Harley's church were partners — full partners — in showing love and support for their immigrant neighbors. They crossed the barriers of country and culture to establish supportive friendships.

As people devoted to partnership, we can reach beyond the Christian community to work with others for the *common good*. We do this because God has created all of the people of the world in God's image and likeness, and because Jesus challenges us to take such action in the world.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, a Jewish man is attacked by robbers, who strip him and beat him. A Jewish priest sees him and passes by on the other side. Then a Levite spots the beaten man and walks around him. But then a Samaritan comes across this Jewish man, and he is moved with pity — even though the bloody man is not a member of his faith or nationality. The Samaritan bandages the man's wounds, brings him to an inn, cares for him, and then pays the innkeeper to continue his care.

When the Jewish leaders around Jesus admit that the Samaritan was a true neighbor and helper, one who crossed boundaries to save and rescue others, Jesus gives them a simple command, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

That's the command of Jesus to us as well. He wants us to go and be helpers to people around us, working in partnership with others to advance the common good.

Sometimes we will do this within the church, the body of Christ. Other times, we will work with people of other faiths, or with people of no faith, to rescue and save the most vulnerable members of our communities.

Our federal government has notified Ohio that we will receive 855 evacuees from Afghanistan, with 435 of those evacuees heading to Northeast Ohio. At least 185 of those are coming to Cleveland through refugee services, including the Hope Center for Refugees and Immigrants in Brook Park.

Eileen, the center's director, came to Divinity and shared the story of one family as the evacuation was happening. A member of the family who came earlier, worshipped with us that morning. After speaking with some of you, I let Eileen know that Divinity would be willing to sponsor an Afghan family if the need arose. We have already collected \$3,011 for the Hope Center.

Governor DeWine said it well. These are individuals who have been partners with the United States and deserve our support in return for the support they've given us. Thank you to the resettlement agencies they have the resources necessary to help these people in their time of need."

In every situation, we are challenged to join Divinity and work in harmony. This means understanding that we are not meant to live alone, but to create partnerships in which we help one another and work for the common good.

May the peace of God . . .