



## **Psalm 124**

*If it had not been the LORD who was on our side —let Israel now say—if it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us, then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.*

## **Mark 9:38-41**

*John said to him, ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’ But Jesus said, ‘Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.*

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### *What’s In A Name?*

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A burglar broke into a house in the middle of the night. As he tiptoed through the living room, he heard a loud voice say, “Jesus is watching you.” He looked around, didn’t see anything, and moved forward. Again he heard, “Jesus is watching you.” He looked around again and spotted a bird cage. In the cage was a parrot. He asked the parrot, “Was that you who said Jesus is watching me?” The parrot said, “Yes.” The burglar breathed a sigh of relief, then asked the parrot: “What’s your name?” The parrot said, “Moses.” The burglar laughed and said, “Who would name a parrot Moses?” The parrot said, “The same people who would name a pit bull Jesus.”

What’s in a name? Sometimes our whole reputation is wrapped up in our name. A current cop show, “Blue Bloods,” has given

the main characters the last name of Reagan. Gee, I wonder who that show is trying to conjure up in viewers' minds with that name? On the other hand, a long-ago cop show, "Hill Street Blues," had a stand-up comic with the name of Vic Hitler. Hitler is probably not the last name anyone would want in any profession, let alone stand-up comedy.

A last name can sometimes be deceiving. I remember going to elementary school, having the same teachers my two older sisters had. The teachers appreciated them, because they were smart and hard-working and, since we had the same last name, I think the teachers expected me to be equally smart and hard-working. Um...sorry to disappoint. (I do hope I've improved a bit since my elementary school days, though.)

How about you? How much stock do you put in someone's name? If you trusted their parents or their siblings, do you trust them? If you distrusted their parents or their siblings, do you distrust them? A name can be very important. A name was certainly very important a couple thousand years ago. And, of course, that name still is important.

Jesus one day essentially said to his disciples, who were concerned about someone casting out demons in the name of Christ: Don't worry about it. It's okay. Whoever is not against us is for us. If somebody helps you because you bear the name of Christ, that's a good thing.

If we bear the name of Christ, I hope we also follow the teachings of Christ. Love everyone. Forgive everyone. Help everyone. If we bear the name of Christ, but don't follow the teachings of Christ - if we don't love everyone, if we don't forgive everyone, if we don't help everyone - are we really bearing the name of Christ? If we bear the name of Christ, we bear the responsibility of living up to the name of Christ.

Someone made a donation recently to our church. He made the check out to, "Bill Freeman or Menifee United Church of Christ." He gave the check to me. And I immediately gave the check to my wife to give to the church, so I wouldn't be tempted to cash it and go to Vegas. (If there are any literalists out there: I

wouldn't do that.) That check was good, because it had the donor's name on it, and his name was good.

When we do something good in the name of Christ, it's like Jesus is the co-signer with us on a check. When we feed the hungry, as we did yesterday at our Saturday Breakfast, and when we do it in the name of Christ, it's like Jesus is there with us, feeding the hungry, also. It's like Jesus is co-signing the check we write to the hungry. On the other hand, when we do something bad - like, say, one country goes to war with another country, unprovoked - we can't say we're going to war in the name of Christ. Well, we can, but it wouldn't be true. I believe Jesus doesn't want anything to do with an unjust war. But when we do something good, I believe Jesus wants to help us. And I believe God wants to help us, too.

The Psalmist declares, "Our help is in the name of the Lord (or God), who made heaven and earth." That's why when we need help, we sometimes cry out to God. "My God! My God! Help me!" And God does help us, in time. But God's time is not always the same as our time. We live in the Pacific Time Zone. God lives in the Divine Time Zone. That's why patience is a virtue. And that's why God's help is not always what we wanted. Although it's usually what we needed.

A couple years ago, I sent my Ministerial Profile (which is church talk for my resume) to several churches, including this one. But I didn't hear from any of them for months and months. I'm sure at some point I cried out, "My God! My God! Help me!" But nothing happened. So I'd pretty much given up on finding a church group that would want me as their minister. In January 2014, Kathleen and I were vacationing in Florida, found a cute little house about six blocks from the ocean, bought it, and decided to eventually move from Michigan to Daytona Beach, and start a church there. A couple weeks later, I got a call from this church. And then a couple months after that, I got a "call" from this church to be your minister. And the rest, as they say, is history. My help was in the name of God, and it was also in the timing of God.

My journey to this church, I believe, was guided by the name of God and by the name of Christ. And - I humbly submit - that this church's journey to me, I believe, was guided by the name of God and by the name of Christ. Because God and Christ knew that I needed a push to become a more progressive pastor. And God and Christ knew that this church needed a push to become a more progressive church.

Now, I'm supposed to be the faith leader of the people of this church. And I hope my faith bolsters the faith of the people of this church. But I've got to tell you, the faith of the people of this church bolsters my faith. I know there are people here who have a strong faith in the name of God and in the name of Christ. And their faith bolsters my faith in the name of God and in the name of Christ. And even though I'm a Protestant pastor, a Catholic leader bolsters my faith, too.

Pope Francis, one of my spiritual heroes, came to America this past week. Addressing a Joint Session of Congress, the Holy Father spoke "of hope and healing, of peace and justice." The Pope proclaimed to our elected leaders the Golden Rule. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I hope the members of Congress heard Pope Francis, and apply his words to many difficult issues. Immigration Reform! "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Climate Change! "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The Death Penalty! "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The Poor! "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Equality For All! "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The Golden Rule has universal appeal. That's why we print it on the back of our bulletin every week, because it's found in similar form in many faith traditions. Christianity. Judaism. Buddhism. Hinduism. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Whether you help a senior citizen to cross the street or help someone who's lost by giving them directions. Whether you give blood to the Red Cross or give money to a person in need. Whether you donate jeans to our Clothing Closet or cans of soup to our Food Pantry. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Paul said, in God “we live and move and have our being.” And I would say, in Christ we live and move and have our being, too. What does it mean to live and move and have our being in God and in Christ? Well, it means to do what God and Christ would want us to do. So what would God and Christ want us to do? They’d want us to do what they would do if they were physically walking the earth today. And what’s that?

You know the answer to that question better than I do, probably. Be compassionate. Be friendly. Be generous. Be gentle. Be kind. And when you do all those things, because you’re doing all those things that God and Christ would want you to do, you’re doing them in the name of God and in the name of Christ, whether you know it or not, whether you acknowledge it or not.

I heard recently that a church in Menifee has criticized the name of our church - Menifee United Church of Christ. I’m told that a local pastor said - in a sermon, no less - that even though we have Christ in our name, Christ is not in our church. (Gasp!) Now, I don’t know exactly why that pastor would say that, but I have my suspicions. In spite of what that pastor says, I believe that our church is trying our best to do exactly what Christ would do if he were walking the earth today. Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. House the homeless.

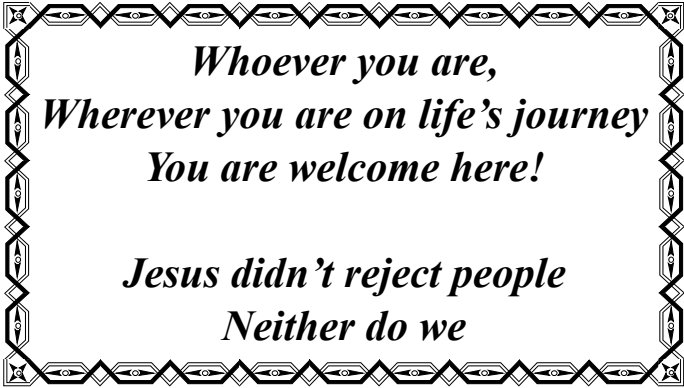
The Good News is this: I’m told that several people left that church because of what that pastor said about our church, and those people have come or will be coming to our church. (In fact, forgive me for this, but I’m hoping more pastors from area churches will bad mouth our church in their sermons, so we can have even more people come to our church.) The even better news is this: About the same time that I heard of that pastor’s condemnation of our church, I heard a long-time member of our church say, “If Jesus came back to earth and walked down the aisle of our church, he’d say, ‘This is what I would do.’” From his mouth to God’s ears. I too believe that what we do in our church Jesus would do. That’s why what we do in our church we do in the name of Christ.

In the name of Christ: This is a homeowners church and this is a homeless church. In the name of Christ: This is a native-born

church and this is an immigrant church. And in the name of Christ: This is a straight church and this is a gay church. I believe that what we do in our church Jesus would do. I hope you believe that, too. Whatever you believe: God bless you and God bless Menifee United Church of Christ.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,  
Help us to welcome everyone.  
Help us to love everyone.  
And help us to live up to the name of Christ.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.*



*Whoever you are,  
Wherever you are on life's journey  
You are welcome here!*

*Jesus didn't reject people  
Neither do we*

## THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you  
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would  
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his  
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others  
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself  
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,  
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others  
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people  
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism