

# Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

## SERMON FOR

March 29, 2015

*“God Helps You”*



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister  
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister  
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children's Minister  
Jim Wilson: Lay Reader

## ***Menifee United Church of Christ***

*Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM*

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***Live Life Fully Alive!***

**Isaiah 50:4-9**

*The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backwards. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.*

**Mark 15:33-39**

*When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah.' And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'*

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“God Helps You”

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A nine year old girl was sitting in church with her mother. The little girl said, “Mommy, can we leave now?” The mother said, “No.” The little girl said, “But Mommy, I have to throw up.” The mother said, “Just go out the front door and around to the back of the church and do it behind a bush.” So the little girl left her seat and came back a minute later. The mother asked, “Did

you do it?" The little girl said, "Yes." The mother said, "How could you go all that way and come back so quickly?" The little girl said, "I didn't have to go all that way. They have a box next to the front door that says 'For the sick.'"

God helps you. That's what I want to talk with you about today. God helps you. Whether you're a child feeling ill or an adult feeling fine. God helps you. Whether you're a believer or a doubter. God helps you. Whether you go to church every Sunday or only at Christmas and Easter. God helps you. (Say to those around you: God helps you. God helps you. God helps you.)

On my Facebook page the other day, I put the title of my sermon. "God helps you." One guy, tongue in cheek, wrote back and said, it's like the Bible says: God helps those who help themselves. I wrote back and said, I don't think that's from the Bible. I think that's from the Gospel of Ben Franklin. Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson and George Washington and all the Revolutionary War leaders were helped by God, I believe. That's how they won the Revolutionary War. God helped them. And God helps you. I believe that, because the Bible tells me so. The prophet Isaiah declares, "It is the Lord God who helps me."

This is Passion Week. During Passion Week we hear the story of how Jesus was betrayed, arrested, convicted, and crucified. Jesus was betrayed by Judas. Jesus was arrested by Roman authorities. Jesus was convicted before Pontius Pilate, (probably of treason, claiming to be, or at least not denying that he was, "King of the Jews"). Jesus was crucified at 9 o'clock in the morning on what we now call Good Friday. At noon, the whole land went dark. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Then Jesus breathed his last. And at that moment, the curtain in the temple was torn in two. And the centurion standing near the cross said, "Truly this was God's Son!" So why didn't God save God's Son? Why did God allow Jesus to suffer on the cross? Why does God allow anyone to suffer? Why does God allow you to suffer? And why would I call this sermon, "God Helps You," when it looks like that sometimes God doesn't help you or anyone else, including Jesus?

Passion Week is like the first part of a two-part episode of a television drama. I remember when I was a kid, maybe ten years old, watching *"The Man From Uncle,"* my favorite TV show back then. At the end of one episode, Napoleon Solo, played by Robert Vaughn, was about to enter a building where the bad guys were. Then it said: To be continued. I thought: Oh my goodness. I have to do something to warn Napoleon Solo, played by Robert Vaughn. I have to write to, where? I know: Hollywood! Yes! And I have to write to who? I know: Napoleon Solo...played by Robert Vaughn. Wait a minute. And it was like scales fell from my eyes. This is a TV show. They just showed previews of next week's episode and obviously Napoleon Solo, played by Robert Vaughn, makes it out alive. Spoiler Alert! I don't want to ruin the Passion Week story for you. But things turn out okay for Jesus. It doesn't seem so good for Jesus on Good Friday of Passion Week, when Jesus dies on a cross. But as they say: Friday's here, but Sunday's comin'. When Easter Sunday comes, we'll see that God does not forsake Jesus. God helps Jesus. And God helps you.

A German airliner crashed into the French Alps this past week, killing all 150 people on board. Investigators say the co-pilot locked the pilot out of the cockpit, when the pilot went to the restroom. Then the co-pilot deliberately murdered all the people on the plane. We don't yet know why. Why would God allow that to happen? Why wouldn't God tell the pilot not to go to the restroom? Why wouldn't God change the co-pilot's mind at the last second and have him pull up the plane from the nosedive it was on? And why would I include this story in a sermon entitled "God Helps You"?

Peggy Lee had a hit song years ago. "Is That All There Is?" Peggy Lee sings, "Is that all there is? Is that all there is? If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball. If that's all there is." That's not all there is, though, of course. At least I don't think that's all there is. That's not all there is of Peggy Lee, who died in 2002. That's not all there is of those 150 people on the French Alps. That's not all there is of Jesus on the cross. That's not all there is of you and me when we die. We believe, or at least I believe, that we live on, or that our soul lives on, in heaven. Forever and ever.

That's why I can talk about death, natural and tragic, and still preach a sermon entitled, "God Helps You."

Atheists were the subject of a CNN Special Report that I saw last week. Stan, not his real name, is a minister someplace, they didn't say where. Stan's identity and location were kept secret, because he doesn't believe in God. He's afraid he'd lose his job if people knew he was an atheist. CNN said there are thousands of ministers who don't believe in God. I know some of them. I was at a party once with about a half dozen other ministers. We were all chatting in the living room of a minister's home. One minister said, "We all have something in common." Then, from out of the blue, another minister said, "We preach what we don't believe." I didn't say anything, but I thought: I don't preach what I don't believe. I only preach what I do believe. Now granted, I may believe something one week and preach that, and I may believe something completely different the next week and preach that. But I never preach what I don't believe. I think what that minister was implying was that he and the other ministers don't believe in the existence of God. Not me. I don't see how any minister can ignore the existence of God.

A cartoon I saw years ago showed dogs barking. Arf! Arf! Arf! Then the cartoon translated what: Arf! Arf! Arf! means. It means: Hey! Hey! Hey! The dogs are trying to get people's attention. Now I don't want to compare God to dogs (even though they say people with dyslexia worship Dog). But I think God tries to get people's attention, too. God doesn't bark to get people's attention. God puts a glorious sunset, a beautiful flower, a smiling baby, in front of our eyes. That's God saying: Hey! Hey! Hey! I don't see how anyone, seeing the glory of God all around them, can deny the existence of God. Although I can understand how it can happen. I was an atheist when I was younger. Actually, I didn't deny the existence of God, I just didn't acknowledge the existence of God. I didn't go to church, as I eventually would. I didn't see God all around me, as I eventually would. I didn't feel God within me, as I eventually would. How about you? Has that ever happened to you in the past, where you didn't deny the existence of God, you just didn't acknowledge the existence of God? Is that happening to you now? I hope not.

Archbishop Oscar Romero was shot to death - murdered, martyred - while conducting Mass at a Catholic church in El Salvador 35 years ago last week. Archbishop Oscar Romero was likely ordered killed by El Salvador's anti-democratic, oppressive government, because he spoke out against that anti-democratic, oppressive government. They apparently didn't like Archbishop Oscar Romero saying things like, "Peace is not the product of terror or fear...Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all." Again, why would I bring up the tragic death of Archbishop Oscar Romero in a sermon entitled, "God helps you"? How did God help Archbishop Oscar Romero as he was being gunned down? Well, again, I believe that before his body hit the floor, Archbishop Oscar Romero was welcomed by God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit into heaven. Also, Pope Francis has announced that he is putting Archbishop Oscar Romero on the first step to being declared a saint. (Although I think he's a saint already.)

This is Palm Sunday, in addition to this being Passion Week. Palm Sunday is the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt. As he rode into town, people laid down palm branches before him and shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" They did that because they knew Jesus had come to help them. God helps you and me and all who believe in and follow Jesus. And I believe God goes beyond that and helps everyone, because God loves everyone, because God created everyone in God's image, and because God blessed everyone. So I truly believe that God helps you.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,  
Help us to know that you help us.  
Help us to know that you love us.  
And help us to know that you bless us.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.*



*Meniffee  
United Church of Christ*



*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