

Sermon Title: **“Our Help is in the Name of the Lord”**

Bible: **Psalm 124 & Mark 9:38-50 (NRSV)**

When: on Sunday, September 26th, 2021

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube live streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

The snare is broken. We have escaped like a bird from the snare. Our help is in the name of the Lord. Please guide us to follow your way and your love. Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer.

Amen.

1. Intro

When we read today’s scriptures, especially when we read the Gospel of Mark, are you comfortable reading and listening to it? If you were to rate this passage, would it be PG-13 or rated R? There are many seemingly inappropriate stories in the Bible. Before diving into today’s scriptures, I would like to share what I am and what I am not.

2. I am not a literalist.

I am not a literalist. A literalist tends to understand the text literally. I do not understand today’s passages as they are. With the text, I also try to read the context in which it was written. I need to learn about the historical background. I wonder who said this passage, and who wrote this passage. Jesus did not write this passage. One or more followers remembered what Jesus had said and wrote the passage. I also wonder who listened to this passage. In the early church, Christians listened to the Scriptures, rather than reading the Scriptures themselves. Who was the first or original audience? Many people could not read the written word, and paper--at that time,

papyrus--was very expensive. So, the Scriptures would be read aloud, while the congregation listened. There were no copy machines nor printers. The Scriptures on papyrus were written by hand. Because of being handwritten, there were many mistakes made in the manuscripts that would become the Bible. In Mark Chapter 9, can you find verses 44 and 46 in your Bible? Not in the NRSV version. Isn't that interesting? Does your Bible explain this? Anyway, I try to look at the Scripture, not literally, but in many different dimensions. I love the Bible. But I am not a literalist.

3. I am a Methodist Pastor.

I am a Methodist pastor. This means that I already have certain biases. I still love being Methodist, and I chose to be Methodist. Now I have become a pastor of the United Methodist Church. It is important to know who we are when we read the Bible, because we are biased in some ways. That's because we cannot be free from our own backgrounds. For example, if you give a call to a neighboring church office, and if you hear a female voice answer, is she a secretary? (Pause) Or a pastor? How do you pronounce Y. E. S.? Yes! Then, how do you pronounce E.Y.E.S.?

3. How to Become an Open Faith Community?

I am not a literalist. I am a Methodist pastor. And I share my reflections. Disciples came to Jesus, to complain about others, or to boast of what they have done against others. The disciples tried to stop others' ministries. That's because these others did not belong to this group of disciples. However, Jesus taught the disciples that whoever was not against them was for them.

In other words, Jesus guided the disciples to focus on their own ministries rather than being jealous of others. He also added some concerns, which are the uncomfortable parts, the possibility of the snares in our faith journey.

I read today's message as how to become an open faith community. How can we, a Methodist church, keep our own identity and still be open to those outside? We are the people of open hearts, open minds, and open doors. How can we open our doors, while keeping our own houses? There are no simple answers. According to Jesus' concerns, rather than competing with others' ministries, we need to focus and welcome those who come to our church. Looking at others, competing with others, being jealous of others themselves consumes a lot of our energy and time. It is neither what we want nor what God wants. I believe that there is a reason, God's reason, why we are here in Gilroy. With open hearts, open minds, and open doors, I hope for us to listen first rather than to speak, to understand rather than to judge. Sometimes, we ourselves could be a challenge. What we have done by our hands, not only our failures but also our past successes, could be a challenge. Where we went with our feet, what we envisioned with our eyes, could be a challenge. We are thankful for what God has done for us in the past. But I hope for us to look at now and the future with faith and hope. Because of the past successes, I do not want to give up our future. To look at others, rather than ourselves, and to look at our past rather than our future could be a snare. The snare is broken, because our help from God is with us. We can fly like a bird. There is no more snare. This is how I read and how I understand the PG-13 or Rated R passages.

4. Our Mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

What is the mission of the United Methodist Church? Our mission is not to make disciples of the Methodist, but to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Our ultimate goal is not to become Methodists, but to become disciples of Jesus Christ. Methodism is not our destination.

Methodism is like clothes, tools, food, or vehicles for our faith journey. As a biased Methodist pastor, I hope for all of us to get some help, guidance, or sometimes some challenges from our church for our faith journey. Thank you very much for choosing our Methodist Tour. I am your tour guide, and we are all together tour guides and friends. Our faith journey is not only to become disciples of Jesus Christ, but also for the transformation of the world. As we confess in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we hope to live God's kingdom on earth here and now.

What is the mission of the United Methodist Church? To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This mission works like salt. Let us remember this mission in ourselves. We are salty. And when the world tastes us, they will know that we are salty, and that we are the disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, in our faith journey, there are many snares. As you are with us, the snares are broken. Please guide us to fly like a bird, as we have escaped from the snares. Please lead us to fly as disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.