

“Whom Do We Ask?”

Homily by Rev. Rebecca Bryan

November 28, 2021

Helping, Fixing, or Serving – Dr. Rachael Remin
Service is not the same as helping. *Helping* is based on inequality; it's not a relationship between equals. When you *help*, you use your own strength to help someone with less strength. It's a one-up one-down relationship, and people feel this inequality. When we *help*, we may inadvertently take away more than we give, diminishing the person's sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

Now, when I *help*, I am very aware of my own strength, but I don't serve with my strength. I *serve* with myself. We draw from all our experiences: our wounds serve, our limitations serve, even our darkness serves. The wholeness in us serves the wholeness in the other and the wholeness in life. *Helping* creates debt: when you help others, they owe you. But *service* is mutual. When I *help*, I have a feeling of satisfaction, but when I *serve*, I have a feeling of gratitude.

Serving is also different from *fixing*. We fix broken pipes. We don't fix people. When I set about *fixing* another person, it's because I see them as broken. *Fixing* is a form of judgement that separates us from one another. It creates a distance.

So, fundamentally, *helping*, *fixing*, and *servicing* are ways of seeing life. When you *help*, you see the other as weak. When you *fix*, you see the other as broken. And when you *serve*, you see the other as whole.

When we *serve* in this way, we understand that the other people's suffering is also our suffering, that their joy is also our joy, and then the impulse to serve arises naturally. Our natural wisdom and compassion present themselves quite simply. Servers know that they're being used and have the willingness to be used in the service of something greater. We may *help* or *fix* many things in our lives, but when we *serve*, we are always in the service of wholeness.

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How many of you are the “helpers”?

Raise your hand if you are comfortable being the person who gives help, rather than the one who

asks for or receives help, be it within your family, work, friend group, or church.

Now keep your hands raised if you, as the helper, are equally comfortable asking for and receiving help.

(you can put them down)

Now raise your hand if you are more comfortable asking for help than offering or giving assistance.

Most people find it difficult to ask for help.

Those of us who don't have most likely been in situations in life where they have been forced to ask for help. If that is the case for you, I hope you've, as I have, found that asking for help is not so bad. In fact, it can be beautiful. That is my experience.

Asking for help is one of the first things people in recovery from addictions are taught to do. The sponsor, or person with more experience, will encourage people new to recovery to call three to five people every day to develop their network of support. It is much easier for us to learn to pick up the phone when we are not in crisis; then when we are, picking up the phone will be natural and a relief.

People talk about how “heavy” the phone is and how they feel like a burden when they do reach out. But after a little while, they realize that asking for help is as helpful to the person being asked as it is to the person asking for help, if not more.

Asking for help goes beyond recovery. Being able to ask for and receive help is a universal necessity. Sooner or later we all need help. When we do, we learn that it is not so hard and that unexpected gifts accompany asking for help.

Many an enduring friendship started with a simple request for help, even from a stranger or someone here at church. Asking for help between family members often brings about a new level of closeness and authenticity. Folks have more intimate and real conversations during illness or at their times of death than in all the previous years.

Stripped of our facades or defenses, including

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staunch independence, others get to see the beauty in our realness and respond to that. We love each other when we understand the other's vulnerabilities, often more so than when we are blinded by their achievements or talents.

I remember asking a dear colleague how I knew if being a minister was the right calling for me. He replied by telling me what he did the day before. "I sat by the bedside of someone in the hospital, changed a lightbulb in an elderly person's apartment, and served communion to a shut in." "That sounds like heaven." I replied.

"I think you have your answer," he said, smiling and placing his hand on mine. He was right, though he didn't mention that I would be asking for help as frequently as offering it, if not more.

I could never minister to this church on my own. You are the ones who love and care for one another, in large and small ways. You minister to each other all the time. I continue to be amazed by all the ways you make this church hum, the ways you show up for one another and reach out to offer help and, yes, ask for it. It is inspiring, and as it should be. Caring for one another and caring for our world are core to who we are as a faith community.

To that end, everyone is invited to participate in an online conversation sponsored by the Program Council, happening on Tuesday, December 7th at 6:30pm. The purpose is to discuss church in the aftermath and continuation of COVID. We need to regroup and understand how to get folks back in the habit of coming to church, what people are looking for and need from church, and how to reach people so they know about all the things going on here. We are asking for your help as we find our way through these times together. Please join the discussion if you can. We need you.

What then makes it so difficult to ask for help? I'm sure the answer to this varies from person to person; however, there are some common themes. First, let's face it, asking for help makes us feel vulnerable; and the more we need the help, the more vulnerable we feel. Vulnerability alone stops many people from asking for what they need or want.

Another common obstacle to asking for help is thinking that asking for help makes us indebted

to the other person or people, somehow obligated to return the help in the future. Another common obstacle is the fear that we will be rejected, that we will ask for help and the other person will say no.

If asking for help makes you feel that you must return the favor, that may not be the person to ask. Ideally, we give and receive freely. We give in one relationship or situation and receive in another. It is not quid pro quo. And, yes, sometimes people will say no, just as we need to decline sometimes, and that's okay. More times than not, someone's "no" is not about you personally.

The remaining question is whom we ask for help. This question is worthy of consideration. Asking the right thing of the right people is part of mastering the skill of discernment. Matching your ask with the person or people is key. Sometimes it's a friend or family member; sometimes it's a professional or someone we pay.

We can ask for help from each other at church in several ways. You can ask friends, you can reach out to me or any of the staff, or you can reach out to our various care ministries, including the Parish Friends, the addiction ministry team, and the Pastoral Care Associates, who you heard from earlier in this service. There are approximately 90 people in the congregation who are here to formally offer help. In reality we are all here to ask for and receive help from each other.

We would love to hear from you now...

When have you asked for help, and how did it change your life? What was it like? I'm wondering if a few of you would be willing to share. You can be as specific or general as you wish. Just please share your own story and not someone else's. Justin will come around with a microphone.