



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

4th Sunday of Easter

April 17, 2016

“In His Hand”

(John 10:27-30)

Rev. David K. Groth

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10:27-30).

COLLECT: Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Football coaches hate fumbles. They don't like even using the word. It gives them the heebie jeebies. Imagine: it's a minute to go in the fourth quarter. The game is close. Packers have the ball on the three yard line: first and goal. Coach sends in the "heavy package", which means the offensive line is filled with what John Madden called, "the big uglies." The running back hits the line, and horror of horrors, coughs up the ball. A defensive back picks it up and starts sprinting. By the time "the heavy package" gets up to top speed, the bad guy is already doing his dance in the other end-zone. That fumble caused a fourteen- point differential.

Coaches hate fumbles. So they've come up with all kinds of ball security drills. It starts with the tuck, high and tight, with five points of pressure (fingers, hand, forearm, elbow and chest). They double up in traffic. There are all kinds of drills. The old fashioned gauntlet, where the ball carrier runs between two lines of players. Some are punching at the ball; others who are trying to rip it out. There are gadgets too. One called the "slipskin" which makes the ball feel slippery and slick, as if wet. There's also the "Ball Security Harness" which is a football with a strap attached to it and a big guy at the other end of the strap running alongside and yanking at it.

Then there's the mental training. When the LSU coach comes in to the locker room he says to the team "Good morning!" They shout back "Good morning coach. It's all about the ball!" He yells: "Protect that ball like your life depended on it. Whatever you do, don't let go of the ball!" The idea is to make ball security second nature.

Meanwhile, the guys on the defensive side are being trained to force a fumble, and make that second nature. Sometimes even after the play is over and whistle has blown you see a hand go in and try to rip the ball out. They can't help themselves. It's become second nature for them.

It's all about the ball. When have you dropped the ball? When have you coughed it up? When did you allow it to be torn from your grasp?

Think of the ball for a moment as the saving faith God has given you. There are lots of ways to drop that ball. Maybe you're one who isn't so active here. You do a lot of things for a lot of people, but you're kind of indifferent to church and worship. You'll come as the spirit moves you. You've dropped the ball or are in process of dropping the ball. "Faith comes by hearing" Paul wrote, "and hearing through the word of Christ." But you're not really hearing any more. You're in heavy traffic out there, with all kinds of people and forces trying to punch or rip that ball, that faith away from you, but you're carrying it around like a loaf of bread, and not like your life depended on it.

Maybe you're one who is quite active at Good Shepherd. You're engaged in community service. You serve also on a committee here or are part of musical group. You're busy. Anyone who looks at you would think, "Now there's an active member." But somewhere along the way you forgot some of the basics. You've forgotten about the five points of pressure. Maybe you've fallen out of the habit of prayer. Bible Study too. And it's been years since you've done a home devotion. You are at risk of dropping the ball.

Maybe you're one on the front edge of an addiction. You had an injury. The doctor prescribed a painkiller, an opioid like Vicodin or OxyContin. It worked really well at first, but your body adapted. It needs more now, but you can't get any more prescriptions. You'll have to buy it illegally. You've grown a physical dependence, and the next step often is heroine. You don't think of yourself like other addicts. No one does. Picture addiction as that defensive player trying to rip that ball out of your hands. When you

become addicted to something, it can have a huge and negative impact on your faith and your relationship with God. You have to protect that ball as if your life depended on it, because it does.

Many fumbles happen when we're being tackled and are on the way down. It can be a severe illness like heart disease or diabetes dragging us down from behind, all the while punching at the ball. High anxiety can trip us up. An affair can knock the ball out of our hands. Grief can too. We should protect that ball like it's our life, but instead we protect other things like pride or position.

(By the way, a Stephen Minister can be of great help with all these things. I've seen them make that difference in people's lives here at Good Shepherd. We have Stephen Ministers available right now. Whatever issue it is that is bothering you, it doesn't need to be critical to ask for a Stephen Minister. They're happy if they can be helpful with the smaller needs as well. We have unassigned Stephen Ministers here and they are available for you or someone you know in the community. Talk to me about it. Or talk to Kathy Wagner. Whatever it is, you don't have to go through it alone.)

"It's all about the ball!" coach says. Whatever you do, don't let go of that ball!" Jesus said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he does not believe shall be condemned." Given what's at stake, there's no higher priority for us than to hold on to the faith God has given us. Given what's at stake, there is no higher priority for the Lord than to hold on to us. Listen again to our text: "My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one, No one will snatch them out of my hand."

You are a lamb of the Lord's own keeping. In Holy Baptism the Lord claimed you as his own and said, "You're mine!" "My sheep. My people. My child." So think of him holding on to you sort of like a father holds on to a new born infant, with five points of contact: fingers, hand, forearm, elbow, chest. Jesus said, "No one is able to snatch you out

of my hand.” He’s telling you his grasp is always stronger. He’s telling you that he’s not going to let the devil or anyone else rip you out of his possession. He’s telling you you can relax and trust in him. He’s telling you you’re safe.

Often, one of things we say is “It’s not all about you, you know.” But here’s one place where it is all about you, at least from the Lord’s perspective. Given what’s at stake, he’s not going to let you go. He’s giving us a certain assurance here. This is closely related to the doctrine of predestination, which is not meant to trouble us but to comfort us. The hand of Jesus is mightier than that of any hostile force. “Though hordes of devils fill the land All threat’ning to devour us, We tremble not, unmoved we stand; They cannot overpow’r us.” They cannot overpower us, because they cannot overpower him. “This world’s prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none” because we are in God’s hand.

God’s Word conveys this message of safety in so many different ways. Apparently it’s an important message and he wants us to hear it! In our Psalm: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” He says it also in Joshua 1, “Have I not commanded you? Do not be afraid . . . for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” He says it in Psalm 4, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.” He says that we’re safe in his grasp in so many different ways. He says it in Psalm 21, “The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid?” There are tons more, but I give just one more. A simple confession from 2 Timothy 2, “The Lord will . . . bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.” Say it with me: “The Lord . . . will bring me safely . . . into his heavenly kingdom.” For he said no one can snatch them out of my hand.

You may remember this verse in the King James Version: “No one can pluck you out of my hand.” But pluck is not what Clay Matthews does to footballs. Pluck is

something that little Bo Peep does to dandelions. Our translation uses the word “snatch.” Still, that doesn’t sound strong enough. So I looked up the word Jesus uses here in the Greek. It means “to take something forcefully, aggressively, quickly, rapaciously.” It’s used earlier in this same chapter. “The hired hand, when he sees the wolf coming he flees, and the wolf snatches at the sheep and scatters them.” Can you see that happening? It’s a violent attempt to take something away.

Interesting enough, in one place, the roles are reversed and it is the Lord who is snatching things from the Evil One. We read about it in Matthew 12. Jesus had just healed a demon-possessed man. When the Pharisees heard about it, they said, “By the prince of demons this fellow drives out demons.” To which Jesus responded, “That makes no sense. Why would Satan be divided against himself in that way.” Then Jesus goes on to tell a very short parable. “How can someone enter a strong man’s house and snatch or plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he can plunder his house.” Can you picture the Lord doing that? So much he loves us, even those of us who have dropped the ball, coughed it up, lost it one way or another . . . so much he loves us that the Lord forcefully, aggressively, quickly, rapaciously snatches us back. The good Lord plunders the strong man’s house because the Lord is stronger still.

Well, in any event, remember, “It’s about the ball.” When the ball is your faith, “Whatever you do, don’t let go of the ball. Protect it as if it were your life” . . . because, in a lot of ways, it is.

And as you walk through this life, remember how much a priority you are to the Lord. Even at expense of his own life, he gives you eternal life. Risen from the dead, the great Shepherd of the Sheep now has all power and authority. Through Holy Baptism, you are in his hand, and no one, and nothing is more powerful than his hand. “No one will snatch them out of my hand.” Thanks be to God! Amen.

