

September 11, 2011

Sermon Title: Firmly in His Grasp!

Text: Psalms 40, Romans 14:1-12

OUR LORD HOLDS US FIRMLY IN HIS PROTECTIVE GRASP SO THAT WE WILL NOT BE SHAKEN.

INTRODUCTION

Grace, mercy and peace to you from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

It was at just about this time 10 years ago that the reality began to sink in.

Like many of you I am sure, it was a morning that I can still recall with vivid clarity, as clear and bright as that blue September sky. I was driving to work, when the reports began coming in over the radio. For a few minutes of my commute, all seemed to be confusion, “How could a plane hit a building when there’s not a cloud in the sky?” “What kind of crazy accident could have caused something like this?”

But then, as I neared the office, the shocking reality became very clear. We were under attack. This was a deliberate and organized terrorist strike and there was more to come – a second plane, a second tower and then a third plane and yet another violent impact.

Once in the office, the conference room television came on and, like most of you here today, we watched in unbelief as the next 102 minutes passed. 2,603 lives lost and countless others changed forever.

The striking reality that evil was not simply a concept, but a tangible, painful and violent truth, shook us to our very core. Satan, the old evil foe, that roaring lion from 1st Peter, seemed to roar his loudest that day. And for a time, our weak and sinful selves may have wondered if, perhaps, he had won.

No real work was accomplished that day in our office. The events had made our day-to-day tasks of marketing insignificant. Our minds were full of scrambled thoughts and our hearts were full of erratic and misdirected emotions. Not really sure of what to do next, it came as a great comfort when I was informed that our church would be holding a special service of prayer that evening.

For over an hour we gathered as Christ's body, His Church, and we read Psalms, Scriptures and Prayers. We sang hymns and we celebrated Holy Communion.

As clear as I remember the events of that fateful morning, I just as clearly remember some of the verses sung and some of the scriptures that were read that evening.

Psalms 62 and 46 as well the Psalm we sang today, Psalm 40, were just some of them.

And it was there, gathered together as Church, united as one, around Christ's gifts, that the confused thoughts and emotions began to find a sense of order.

When Satan and the world all seem to be against us, when they seem to be winning and we appear to be on the losing end of the deal; when confusion, loss, pain, anger and emotion appear to be ruling the day, the sure knowledge that Christ continues to be alive and active, gathering, feeding and redeeming His sheep, is the only way our souls will find rest.

As we sang in Psalm 40, verse 11; *"A for You, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!"*

And from Psalm 62, we read, *"My soul finds rest in God alone, my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, He is my fortress, I will never be shaken."*

Yes, in the midst of this unstable world, you can rest assured that OUR LORD
HOLDS US FIRMLY IN HIS PROTECTIVE GRASP SO THAT WE WILL NOT
BE SHAKEN.

PAGE ONE, The Law Then

Fighting, quarrels, attacks and distress unfortunately, are something we must face throughout our days on this sin-broken world. It was as true in King David's time as it is in our own. It was true as well in the days of St. Paul.

It is believed that David wrote the 40th Psalm when he was a young man being pursued by King Saul and he most likely wrote Psalm 62 when he was under attack by his own son Absalom. Throughout his life David would turn to the only true source of comfort and salvation, God alone.

For Paul, the quarrels and fighting seem to be of a much less violent nature. Paul was trying to make peace among people with differing opinions. But these were new Christians suffering under Roman persecution and the daily threat of death. These Roman Christians were arguing over what the others were doing, what they were eating and what day of the week was better than the other. Paul realigns their focus. If their new church was to survive, they had to stop worry about themselves

and what each other was doing and they needed to start focusing on living to the Lord. *“For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.”*

PAGE THREE, The Gospel Then

Think about those words of truth from Paul. Whether we live or whether we die, WE ARE THE LORD’S. Being the Lord’s very own, held tightly in His mighty and loving grasp, makes the small quarrels of whose way is right way and whose is wrong, of little importance. It didn’t even matter if they were to die, they were the Lord’s! For the Roman Christians, living under the constant and very real threat of death, this truth came as great comfort.

It was much the same for David too. Threatened and under attack by his king, or later, by his own son, he turns to God alone and takes comfort in knowing that he is under the Lord’s protection, that he is the Lord’s very own. He knows that God alone is his rock, his fortress and his salvation. He knows that the Lord’s steadfast love and faithfulness will preserve and protect him.

David and the early Christians knew that THE LORD WOULD HOLD THEM FIRMLY IN HIS PROTECTIVE GRASP AND THAT THEY WOULD NOT BE SHAKEN.

PAGE TWO, The Law Now

When we recall the horrors that took place ten years ago, it is easy to feel that we have been let loose from God's hand. When the pains, trials and temptations of this world overpower us we can fall into the old evil foe's snare. We become fatalistic, we forget God's blessing and promise and we easily fall into despair. Like the Christians in Rome that Paul was addressing, we can begin to argue, fight and pass judgment on one another. But all this does is let Satan and his devils have their way.

No, rather than fall prey to the violence, arguments and squabbles of this mortal world, it is far better to fall back on the sure and eternal promises of Christ. It is better to fall into His mighty, steadfast and caring hands, because He alone is our rock and our salvation, He is our fortress. And no matter what happens, whether we live or even whether we die, as Paul assures us, we are the Lord's. We are His very own.

The Lord makes us His own with Water and with Word, and he continues daily to hold us in His firm grasp. He continues to nourish us with His Word and Sacraments. He continues to gather us together as His Church - and not just here in this place, but together with all the faithful throughout this nation and the throughout the world. Together, united in the confession of Jesus as the Christ, He gives us the victory over any and all that Satan may throw our way.

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One of the hymns we sang that evening 10 years ago is one I know you are all familiar with. I had sung it here often at Trinity as boy, and have sung it every year since. But for some reason that night the verses touched me deeply. You all know it, it's the old Luther stand-by, number 656, "A Mighty Fortress." Many of you may think of it as an old chestnut best brought out only on Reformation Day. But after the tragic events of that morning verse 3 struck directly at the heart of the matter. Referencing imagery from the Psalms, "*Though devils all the world should fill (and yes the world is still so full of them), all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill; they shall not overpower us. This world's prince (that's Satan,*

you recall) may still scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. Our victory has been won; The Kingdom ours remaineth.”

Amen!

Our Victory Has Been Won! Won on the cross at Calvary, where sin, death and devil were beaten for all eternity. I realize that the old evil foe may make our lives miserable here for a while, with his scowling, roaring and painful attacks. But we are the eternal victors. He can harm us none! Through Christ’s all-availing sacrifice, His death and His glorious resurrection, we are heirs to His heavenly Kingdom. We are His own! We are in His grasp!

CLOSING

Today we take time out to honor all those who were lost 10 years ago. We recall the innocent lives lost and the families whose fates were forever changed. We recall the acts of selfless heroism that have been told as well as the countless acts of heroism that will never be known. We will gather this evening to ring the church’s bell in their memory and it is fitting that we do so.

It is fitting that we ring the church bell, because the church bell is more than just a sound of earthly remembrance. Our old bell is first and foremost a call to worship. It has rung once already this morning and it will ring again. It will ring the call to come together as His Church - where He gathers, feeds and strengthens us with His gifts of Word and Sacrament, and then sends us out to serve our neighbors with kindness, love, humility and sacrifice. Our old bell will ring to gather his little ones on the first day of Sunday School, where they will be faithfully taught the Gospel message, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, grow stronger in their faith and in their service to the lord. Our old bell will ring the call of true Victory, the eternal victory of Christ over sin, death and the devil.

The bell will ring tonight and it will ring next week as well, on Rally Day. It will continue ringing us to “gather,” to gather as His children, as His very own, and to bring friends along as well. So that everyone can join in His victory, so that they can be caught up in His mighty and steadfast hands. So that they too can rest assured that...

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In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.