

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“His Hold on Us”

Rev. David K. Groth

LWML Sunday, Oct. 9, 2022

“I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creations, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

Jacklyn and I met on Christianmingle.com. First, we messaged each other. Then we had a number of Facetime conversations. Then we met in person for Sunday afternoon coffee at a truck stop in Illinois. (That was my bad, but it worked out.) Then it was time to have a real date. She came up one Saturday morning and we headed to Madison for a Badger football game, complete with the festivities at Union South beforehand.

On the way, we were having a nice, lively conversation. Just outside of Madison, I took a chance. I asked Jacklyn if I could hold her hand. I hadn't planned on it; it just came out. She said “yes”. I reached over and took hold, and, rather suddenly, our lively conversation came to a screeching halt. It startled us into silence.

There is something powerful and nearly sacred about holding someone's hand. There's something of a promise in it. Both of us had to remind ourselves we were not breaking any other oaths or vows or promises.

Do you remember taking hold of your spouse's hand for the first time? Do you remember as a new parent, putting your finger into the tiny hand of your newborn and feeling the delicate grip? Or think about a teacher holding the hand of a timid preschooler as they cross the parking lot. Or a brave teenager reaching out his or her hand to console an opponent who was hurt in competition. Or a bride and groom holding hands before a pastor on their wedding day. I always love the sight of an elderly couple holding each other's hands as they walk around town. It's also a powerful sight in the hospital, as one spouse holds the hand of the other as he or she passes from this life to eternal life. There are times when it's important to take hold of another's hand, and not let go.

Just so, God has taken hold of you, and will not let go. That's the promise of our text. “I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Today is LWML Sunday, which stands for Lutheran Women's Missionary League. It's a nation-wide organization of our Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. They are committed to missions, sponsoring mission efforts to reach people around the world. They do that with their mites, their small offerings that when put together help more people hear the Gospel of Jesus. For decades the LWML has given strong witness to how God's love holds each of us.

In our text, Paul asks, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Notice the subject of that sentence, and of this entire passage is God. He's the one doing the verbs in Romans 8. Sometimes we get it into our heads that our success depends on us, our strength, our wisdom, our hold of the facts, our creativity. It's our choices that count the most, our grip on Him, our commitment to Him that matters. But Romans 12 reminds us: “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought” (v. 3). It's not about our hold on him, but God's everlasting hold on us.

That newborn infant who wrapped her hand around your finger, so fragile, so weak, so dependent. That's who we are in relation to God. We are weak and utterly dependent. He is strong, all-sufficient and trustworthy.

Three quick take home promises from this text:

1. Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of condemnation.
2. Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of separation.
3. Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have certainty of victory.

We begin with the first. Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of condemnation. Paul asks, “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” God has done everything for our salvation. Paul writes, “Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” Why did He die? To pay for our sins. Why was He raised? Because the Father accepted this payment. It didn't bounce. It wasn't found to have insufficient funds. He dies so we might live. And now, Jesus is interceding for us. His power and love are up to the challenges.

I love the way Corrie ten Boom said it: “There is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still.” Think about this in your own life. Who of us this past week has been perfect? On the other hand, how many of us have said things we wish we hadn’t? How many of us have spoken to a loved one in a tone we wish we could take back? How many of us in these past couple of years have added to the divisions in our country and culture, maybe in our own families? Yes, me too . . . to all the above. The law is convicting because the law shows us exactly where we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The pit we’ve dug for ourselves is deep . . . but God’s love is deeper still. His strong arm is also long and able to reach down and rescue us. Indeed, his stretched-out arms on the cross **did** rescue us. Satan will continue to accuse and condemn you, (that’s what he does), but he cannot undo what Jesus has done for you on the cross. Satan’s argument is with Jesus. Therefore, we have no fear of condemnation because Jesus is for us.

Second: Because Jesus is for us and with us, we have no fear of separation. On the back of your bulletin is a copy of a charcoal drawing by Sara Schempf, former member of Good Shepherd, daughter of Pastor and Karen Schempf. Sara now lives in St. Louis and is serving Holy Cross teachers tell our youngsters in the school here how to hold on to new-born chicks. Don’t hold them with one hand and squeeze the living daylight out of them. And don’t let them fall off your hand and drop to the floor. Just let them rest comfortably in the bowl of your hands. This sketch communicates how fragile we are, how fragile life is. It also communicates the safe, gentle, loving hold God has on each of us.

Paul writes, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” He lists seven things that threaten to come between us and Christ’s love – all of which Paul himself experienced. Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long, we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35-39). In John 10, Jesus says “No one can pluck them out of my hand.” Here, Paul says “Nothing and no one will be able to separate us from Christ’s love.

Notice what Paul does not say in this text. He does not say that life will be free of challenges or difficult circumstances. He does not say we will never experience distress or never be in danger. In fact, elsewhere he gives a litany of his own experiences facing hardships and persecutions and some chronic thorn in the flesh.

Each of us, if we put our minds to it, could make a list of our own struggles. What would your list look like? What would your list include? Who would you include? You may feel that things right now are stacked up against you. But you are safe in His hands. God declares you righteous. God has justified you (v. 33). Our assurance comes from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because of Jesus, 1) we have no fear of condemnation. 2) We have no fear of separation. Lastly, 3) because Jesus is for us and with us, we have the assurance of victory.

In verse 37 Paul writes, “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us”. How does he give us the victory? He gives us the victory through the gift of Holy Baptism. Paul says in Romans 6, “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” The blessings of Christ’s death and resurrection are given us in Holy Baptism. Therefore, being baptized into Christ, we too are victorious: victorious over sin, death, and the power of the devil. We are more than conquerors.

In the hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is our God” Luther says “our champion comes to **fight!** You ask who this may be? The Lord of hosts is He, Christ Jesus . . . He holds the field victorious” (LSB 657, v. 2).

Again, it’s not about our hold on Christ, but His hold on us. We are more than conquerors not because we’ve taken hold of His hand, but because He’s taken hold of us, and we are resting in His hands. Therefore, we can live each day, this day also, confidently trusting in Jesus.

The LWML and the Women of Good Shepherd are committed to sharing these life-saving and life-giving truths with the world. Here at Good Shepherd, the women have been doing this work for over five decades. This news sometimes gets to individuals whose lives seem out of control. But this Good News tells them God is always in control. To the Women of Good Shepherd, thank you for your hearts and hands and voices that share the Gospel. Thank you for your willingness to serve others in love. Thank you for your example and encouragement to us all. May our God continue to hold you and all of us in His love, the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, from whom nothing can separate us. Amen.