

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday.

- It is always the fourth Sunday of Easter, and it is proper that it is so.
- As we continue in this Eastertide and continue to live in the joy, confidence, and strength of the victory Christ has won for us.....
- It is proper that we set aside a day, a Sunday, to focus on that Jesus is our Good Shepherd.
- The Good Shepherd of all our existence and especially our souls; and our role of following His voice wherever He leads us.

Our Gospel reading for today speaks well to all this; but what I would like to do this morning is focus us in on verses 27 and 28 of John chapter 10.

- **“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.”**

I invite you to think about those words for a moment. They are so beautiful and mean so much.

- My sheep. We are Jesus’ sheep. We are so vulnerable and so dependent on our Good Shepherd.
- We sheep hear His voice. We listen, and believe and trust in God’s Word.

And then Jesus says, “I know them.”

- Jesus knows you.
- He knows your needs. Your cares. He knows everything about you and He wants to have a loving and providing and caring Good Shepherd relationship with you.

And then Jesus’ words continue, “And they follow Me.”

- We follow our Master.
- We follow in His footsteps.
- We live in the strength of His victory, especially in this Eastertide.

“And I give them eternal life and they will never perish.”

- God takes total care of us, both now and for all eternity.
- Just as we follow our Good Shepherd, we follow Him to the tomb, and from the tomb to eternal life.

“And no one will snatch them out of My hand.”

- We are in Jesus’ strong, loving, tender, providing hands all the days of our lives.

Those last words, “And no one will snatch them out of My Hand”, are the words I want to focus in on this morning.

- Hand strength.
- I used to be particularly strong with my hands.
- If I got a grip out on something, I was not going to let go.

But the key words there.....”used to be!”

- As I’ve grown older, the grip in my hands has gotten much weaker.
- It is not what it used to be.
- And on top of that, many of you know, about a year ago or so I had to have surgery on my hand.
- I have trouble even completely opening and closing it now.

So, when you have a jar with a lid that’s on it—it has gotten harder and harder to open it.

- Sandy asks me to open it and what had been a normal routine, now is me trying to make sure I don’t embarrass myself.
- My grip just isn’t as strong as it used to be.

Now.....okay with all that.

- You can probably live with that and even find something else to give leverage and help you open jars.

But what if it is a dangerous situation when you really need a strong grip.....or to hold on tight.

- There is a huge wind, a gale force, and your just holding on for dear life.
- You need a strong grip. You don’t need a weak one then.

Or, how about it’s the proverbial you’ve fallen off the edge of a cliff.

- You’ve seen the pictures before.
- Your holding on to that little limb of that shrub brush.
- Let go or lose your grip and it is a long fall to disaster and death.

Those are the kind of moments when you need someone who is stronger than you, who has a grip that can hold on to you.

- So that you aren't blown away in the wind.
- So that you don't fall down the cliff.

Now what is true in the physical realm, is even more true in the spiritual realm.

- We need someone who can hold on to us tight so that we aren't blown away in our faith.
- We need someone whose grip is strong so that we don't fall from our God.
- And, of course, we do have someone and His name is Jesus.
- And He says, "And no one will snatch them out of My hand."

Our Gospel reading begins with Jesus walking in a porch area of the temple.

- It is winter.
- The Jewish leaders see Him and they surround Him.
- They pepper Him with questions.
- "Tell us plainly, are You the Christ?"
- "Are you the One we've been waiting for?"

Well, Jesus says, "I've told you this."

- They don't really want to believe Him.
- They really don't want to follow Him.
- They are not a part of His flock.
- They really want to get rid of Him.

And then Jesus says, "Look at My works."

- See what My HANDS have done.

And what has Jesus' hands done?

- Just before this there was a man who was born blind.
- Back in Biblical days, there was not much you could do when you were born blind.
- Mostly sit there and beg.

Jesus comes to the man.

- He spits on the ground and WITH HIS HANDS He makes the mud.
- He puts it on the man's eyes. He tells him to go and wash.

The man does that and he can see.

- It's amazing work.
- But even more that man believed.

And when the Jewish leaders tried to discredit the man and his witness to Jesus.....

- Jesus finds him and holds on tight to him.

Even a little earlier than that, Jesus is teaching.

- People start to gather.
- More people. More people. Thousands of people are there.
- It gets late in the day. They are hungry.

What does Jesus have to work with.....with His hands?

- Five loaves of bread and a couple of fish.
- Barely enough meal for a young boy.

But watch His hands go to work.

- The bread is broken up and the fish.....and then basket, after basket, after basket, after basket.
- And there are 12 baskets of leftovers.
- Jesus' hands do amazing things and people believe.

You want more examples of this?

- How about something that seems even bigger, more majestic?
- Isaiah 48:13, "My HAND laid the foundation of the earth and My right hand spread out the heavens. When I call to them, they stand forth together."

How about something more personal?

- Isaiah 41:10, "Fear not for I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you. I will uphold you with MY RIGHTEOUS RIGHT HAND."

Jesus' hands are powerful.

- Jesus' hands can hold on to us tight.
- And the older you get.....the more not only does your grip get weaker; but there are also certainly times when you need His firm grip on your faith as well.

We right now have a number of people on our “ill and hospitalized” prayer list.

- Many of them, if we so designated, would be long term illnesses.
- Over and over, week after week, and even minute by minute they battle illness, and pain, and suffering.
- And in some cases they are tired and they are ready to give up.
- They need a strong grip and someone to hang on to them.

We’ve seen pictures of explosions and tornadoes wiping out homes and businesses sometimes for miles.

- Damages are assessed and the victims stand there shaking their heads.
- How did this happen and now what am I going to do?
- In some cases, they don’t know which way to turn and are ready to give up.
- They need a strong grip and someone to hang on to them.

We’ve seen elderly given the words that they can no longer drive. We see folks going from independent living in the home they love, and are comfortable in, and want to stay at.....having to move into elderly living facilities.

- They shake their heads. Where did the years go?
- How did I lose my grip on things?
- Now what am I going to do?
- They need a strong grip and someone to hang on to them.

You see family members who have lost loved ones.

- Why? In some cases I wish it would have been me rather than him or her.
- How am I going to survive? How am I going to make it without them?
- And they feel so lonely. Not just today but next month and next year.
- They miss them. They really, really miss them.
- They need a strong grip and someone to hang on to them.

We’ve all seen the pictures before.

- Children starving and thirsty, stomachs distended, blank faces.

The older you get, the more you’ve seen and experienced and looked at those sort of things.....

- And there can be those moments when you wonder where is God in all of this.

Who seems to be stronger?

- The disaster, the evil, the death seems to have the grip on us.

Or, perhaps you realize how much you need Jesus' firm grip because you just simply messed up.

- Royally did something wrong.
- It cost you a lot of money.
- Drove somebody important away from you.
- Really hurt one of your kids.

You tell yourself, "I'm never going to do that again."

- But you know you will.
- Again, the older you get the more you realize this sinfulness is not going to go away.
- And you even wonder, why would God want to hold on to me?

Well, perhaps as you get older, you begin to realize just how fragile life really is.

- And all it takes is a tiny little virus and now you are isolated.
- Your hands are too weak to work or to play.

Or some cells inside of you begin to mutate and multiply and the treatment for the cancer leaves you so weak your hands can't even pick up your fork.

- A stray bullet, a wrong way drunk driver, an irate person innocently provoked.....
- And your hands can be just as lifeless as any other person's who is dead.
- The fragility of life shows us just how much we need a strong hand because we can't hold on to it on our own.

And Jesus has those strong hands.

- His hands were nailed to a cross.
- Did the nails hold him there?

Hands that can turn bread and fish into a meal for thousands; hands that can heal a man born blind?

- No, those nails didn't hold them there.
- But the love of a Good Shepherd for His sheep held them there.

Royally mess up?

- Jesus reaches out with His forgiveness.
- The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep and then He takes it back up again.

Anything that seems so strong that has such a grip on life like death or destruction or evil.....

- Jesus is stronger.
- He breaks those bonds and comes out of the grave on Easter morning and leads us.

Perhaps some of you have seen this cross-stich before.

- It is a cross and over the top of it are the words, “He leadeth me.”
- The Lord is My Shepherd. I shall not want. He leadeth me.....with a strong hand.
- A grip that won’t let go.

Sometimes, as you grow older, you just need to see how Jesus holds on to us.

- Recently with one of the many disasters.....
- There was a post on Facebook, “seriously what is wrong with people.”

But then somebody else put a post that made me just stop and think.

- It was a quotation for Mr. Rogers.
- You know the guy.....with the sweater and “It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood.”
- Mr. Rogers said when he was young and the news was scary, his mom told him to look for the helper.
- There are always people who are helping.

What is one of the ways Jesus keeps a firm grip on us?

- He lets us see those who are helping.
- Today is Mother’s Day. We give thanks for motherhood.
- Sometimes, many times, one of those helpers you see is the loving hands and arms of a mother.

And for the times you really mess up?

- There is a helper there to.
- Earlier in this service you once again heard the words.....
- “In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
- And those words were being said as the sign of the cross was being made over you with the hands of the pastor.
- Weak hands of the pastor but strong hands in the stead and by the command of Jesus Christ. It is all His doing.

Or, you can almost see Jesus beckoning you to come to His table today.

- Not just a little piece of bread and a sip of wine.
- It is His very hands ready to grab hold of you once again.

There comes those times when you realize the fragility of life and you just need to be held.

- Held in the midst of pain, fear, doubts.....
- Being held tight in Jesus' grip.

Jesus has a promise for you this day.

- **“My sheep hear My voice. I know them. They follow Me.” I will not let them parish and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”**

There are many closing salutations for letters and e-mail.

- One I seen recently fits well today.
- “In His grip”
- That, dear Christian friends, is what we are.
- It is the strong grip of Jesus and no one will snatch us out of His hand.
- Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God, we now prepare our hearts and minds to say together the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 158 in your hymnal.