

WHEN YOUR LIFE IS PUT ON HOLD

The Reverend David O. Guss, Pr.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church
Hallandale, FL

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Coral Gables, FL

St. Timothy Lutheran Church
Miami Gardens, FL

July 1, 2018 – 6th Sunday after Pentecost

Children's Message: *Bend Your Knees For God!*

Object: a feather or a picture of a bird

Scripture: Mark 5:21-43

Pro: Lift Up Your Heads Rec. I Just Came To Praise The Lord (see Lyrics below)

REFRAIN:

I just came to praise the Lord I just came to praise the Lord I just came to praise his holy name I just came to praise the Lord

VERSE 1 and VERSE 2

He came into my life one very special day,

He came into my heart, and showed me a better way,

He said he'd never depart; that's why I say I just came to praise the Lord (*Refrain*)

Good morning, boys and girls. Have you ever watched a bird sleeping on its perch and never falling off? How does it manage to do this? The secret is the tendons of the bird's legs. They are so constructed that when the leg is bent at the knee, the claws contract and grip like a steel trap. The claws refuse to let go until the knees are unbent again. The bended knee gives the bird the ability to hold on to his perch so tightly. Think about that -- the bended knee gives the bird the ability to hold on.

When do we as followers of Jesus bend our knees? It's when we pray, isn't it? We bend our knees. We kneel down at the altar, or beside our bed, and we pray. And, this is what gives us the strength to hold on when we are frightened. Lonely, or feeling very sad. So, the next time you are really troubled, remember how a bird holds on so tightly to a branch on a tree. Its bended knees that gives the bird the ability to hold on. Let's bend our knees also as we pray to God.

DEAR LORD: Let us bend our knees when we pray to you, Lord, trust in you and your love always. Amen.

AND, MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING
KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.

An intriguing story appeared sometime back in *USA Today*. It seems that a Miss Candy Postlethwaite received a sizeable check from the Veteran's Administration. But, that's not the strange part. The strange part is that the check was not made out to her, nor did she know the person to whom the check was made out, nor had she ever been in the military. She put an envelope containing the check back outside for the postman to pick up on his next round. Five days later she got it back in a different envelope. She telephoned the V. A. and was directed to send the check there. She did just that – and, don't you know it - 1 week later she received the check back again, in the same envelope. Next she mailed it to the Treasury Department office in Kansas City where the check originated along with a certified letter advising that it did not belong to her and that she did not know the person to whom it had been issued. The check was returned to her in a different envelope. Well, all told she got this check returned to her a total of 7 times until she finally decided in desperation to call the secret service office and told one of the agents she intended to destroy the check. He informed her that to destroy the check would be against the law - it was government property! He finally told her to just cash the darn thing, to which she responded, "My name is not even on the check and it isn't my money. *USA Today* went on to say she is awaiting further instructions.

I titled today's sermon *When Your Life Is Put On Hold* because we often experience these frustrating experiences that are sometimes not so amusing. Being "*put on hold*" is often a familiar as well as frustrating experience for many of us. It is particularly frustrating when you are making an urgent phone call and you are put on hold. They've added pleasant music to hold buttons nowadays. But, it doesn't help when the situation is serious, however. In fact, it is even more irritating! Life is no fun when you are put on hold.

Picture a frantic father whose daughter is dying. He has heard that there is a specialist nearby who may be able to save his daughter's life. He puts on his coat and searches the community for this esteemed physician. This man of prominence and power in the community finds the physician and he lays aside his pride and literally by getting down on his knees at the physician's feet and begs him to come see his daughter. The father's name is Jairus. The esteemed physician's name is Jesus. Will Jesus come lay his hands on the girl? Of course he will. Mark simply tells us, "*Jesus went with him.*" But wait. There's a break in the story. While Jesus is making his way through the crowds, a woman with an issue of blood reaches out and touches the hem of Jesus' garment. Jesus stops, engages her in conversation, and ministers to her. Can you imagine though how this frantic father Jairus felt watching all this? His daughter is dying and some woman begins to tie up Jesus' time with her complaint. Jairus is put on hold while Jesus took the time stop and minister to another person on the way. Why does Jesus seem to dawdle sometimes? Why isn't he quicker to respond to our requests? Doesn't he know that the matters we often bring before him are urgent? Is there anyone here who has not asked that question at some time or another about God? **This question goes right to the heart of prayer.** Why do our prayers sometimes seem to go no higher than the ceiling?

The story is told of a 3rd grade teacher who had been working long and hard to help a certain student improve his behavior and attitude. After her reading class was continuously disrupted by this student, the teacher in

her frustration said to the boy, “*John, I am going to turn you over to God.*” Another boy who happened to be walking by said, “*You can do that, Ms. Jones, but I can guarantee you - God is going to give him right back to you.*” The point is, why does that seem sometimes to be true of our prayers? We know God loves us. We know he is aware of our needs. We have confidence that he is moved by our prayers. It’s just that sometimes God just seems to move very slowly. And, it is difficult for us to deal with those delays. We feel so helpless.

An O’Hare Airport study of air traffic controllers, completed just prior to the controller’s strike several years ago, confirmed the high stress level that these controllers are under. The job is stressful, however, not simply because these controllers have to make decisions that affect the lives of others. They are stressed because, although they are called controllers, they often feel they are anything but in control because of fluctuating weather, pilot error, equipment failure, and so on. We are also told, nurses have more stress than physicians because they have less control while still having the responsibility. In such situations where we have responsibility but not control, we have learned to depend on prayer. But, anyone who has long had an active prayer life knows - there are times when we confront a profound silence on the other end of our prayer line.

Now, picture this frantic father waiting for Jesus to minister to the woman with the issue of blood. His worse fears are realized when some friends comes and deliver to him news no parent wants to hear. “*Your daughter is dead.*” His friends say. “*Why bother Jesus any longer?*” Jairus’ friends try to give him their support but there is a limit to how much support one can offer at a time like this. Fortunately, Jesus was still there. Jesus had not forsaken Jairus just as he does not forsake us. He probably touched him on the arm or the shoulder as he said, “*Don’t be afraid, just believe.*” And, herein lies the spiritual lesson for us – **God may be asking a lot of us at times when he puts us on hold. But, it is during those times that we have to hold on ever firmer to the promises of God. God will not forsake us even if he does not work on our time schedule.**

In today’s children’s sermon, I explained to the little ones why is it that a bird, when it flies onto a telephone wire, it can hold on to the wire with a strong grip and not fall off? The secret has to do with the tendons of the bird's legs. They are so constructed that when the leg is bent at the knee, the claws contract and grip like a steel trap. The claws refuse to let go until the knees are unbent again. The bended knee gives the bird the ability to hold on to his perch so tightly. Now think metaphorically with me for a second - bended knees gives birds the ability to hold on. Maybe the spiritual lesson there for us, similar to the way God created mother nature, is we need to get on bended knee as well “when life puts us on hold or when we are facing trials and tribulations” and hold on ever firmer to the promises of God like never before. This though makes me want to look again at what our 1st lesson told us today from Lamentations – read with with me again verse 1 through 6: “*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him.’ The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.*” Great is thy faithfulness – that is what God is asking of us today – to have great faith and put our complete trust in him.

Jesus made his way to Jairus' house accompanied by his 3 closest disciples - Peter, James, and John. When he came into the house he saw family and friends weeping loudly. *"Why all this crying and commotion?"* Jesus asked. *"The girl is not dead. She is only sleeping."* Those gathered there ridiculed his diagnosis. He asked them to leave the house. Then, he went into the room where the little girl lay. Taking her by the hand he said to her, *"Talitha cumi."* *"Little girl, I say to you arise."* And, she arose.

Do you believe Jesus could perform this kind of miracle? A prominent neurosurgeon by the name of Rainer recalls an incident that occurred when he was a senior medical student. He was working in an emergency room when an unconscious 12-year-old boy was wheeled in with a stab wound to his heart. The cardiac monitor showed a straight line. The boy's skin was cold and his pupils didn't react to light, indicating that the boy's brain was not functioning. Rainer looked to the nurse and said, *"He's dead,"* and told her to turn off the monitor. Just then the doctor came into the room, felt the wound on the dead boy, grabbed a needle and stuck it into the boy's chest. Immediately the boy's heart began to beat; a few hours and an operation later he was moving his legs and mumbling. Rainer comments, *"I left the room and wandered down the hall, thinking. I had just pronounced a boy dead who had been saved seconds later while I watched."* Is it really any more difficult to believe that the Lord of Life can take a little girl's hand and bring her back from the dead than that a surgeon can perform the same miracle with a needle pressed into the chest? **We hold on to Christ's promises because we know that he is the Lord of life and death.** When our lives are put on hold - we do not let go, because we know that he does not let go of us.

In his book, *Fathers and Sons*, Ivan Turgenev, a renowned novelist, tells about a father and mother whose only son had been killed in a war. They go out to another poorly kept cemetery to visit his grave. The weeds have grown up, the fence is down, the trees have fallen and been left where they fell. But, there is one grave that is well kept, green and smooth as velvet. It is the grave of their son. As the elderly couple stand holding hands, looking down on the green, flower-covered grave, they bow their heads in prayer. They pray, *"O gracious Heavenly Father, grant that one day in your homeland and in your own eternity we three may be together again, and know each other and love each other and live down the centuries together. O God, please grant this one thing, that we may live together again."* What a profound prayer. This couple's lives had been put on hold in terms of their relationship with their son, but they trusted God that the three would one day be reunited. They had come to know Christ as the Lord of life and death. They held on ever tightly to God's promises. And, so should we whenever our lives are put on hold. When it seems your life is put on hold, remember God has never nor will he ever let go of you today, now, and forever more. Amen.

