

“Holding On When Life Gets You Down”

Job 7: 1-7, Mark 1: 29-39

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“Let us go on to the neighboring towns; that I may preach there also; for that is why I came.” Mark 1: 38

In the French Alps, a young man was trapped for three days on the north face of the dangerous “Fools Needle” in the Mont Blanc range. He was found dangling from a narrow ledge with his hands frozen. Later he spoke about the frightening experience, “I repeated over and over to myself, I must hold on, I must hold on.” There are times when many of us will whisper those desperate words: “I must hold on.”

Some years ago, artists were invited to paint a picture expressing the idea of “peace.” The pictures submitted were many and varied, but the winner depicted a little bird sitting calmly on a nest, which was built on a slender branch overhanging Niagara Falls. I don’t think I sound too dramatic when I say that all of us live our lives in a nest on a slender branch suspended over something akin to Niagara Falls. Sometimes the winds blow and the rains fall. Our perch becomes mighty precarious!

That may have been Job’s feeling in his words in our Old Testament text: “When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I rise?’ But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn.. .; My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and come to their end without hope.” (Job 7:4,6)

Job had a pretty negative and dark outlook. I suspect there are persons here this morning who are fighting very hard not to be negative and pessimistic; they just hold on. Their feeling may arise because of their work,

the world economic problems, or maybe their marriage. It may be a health issue or a loved one's battle against disease. Perhaps it is an unhealthy attitude about life. It may be a strained or unrewarding relationship with someone you want to love. Whatever it is, there is a battle going on and there is a real question as to whether you can hold on.

Let me offer some insights which I have thought about for a long time. The first is, that holding on must involve the recognition that a person's mental attitude clearly affects his or her ability to be physically healthy and mentally able to cope with life. What I want to say is we can concentrate on our problems rather than on our power to overcome whatever is bothering us. When we do this we paralyze our ability to deal with the problem.

I recall the words of Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, longtime pastor of Marble Collegiate Church, in New York City. Dr. Peale told the story of a city-man who went out to the country and watched a farmer who was sawing a log with long, even, measured strokes. The visitor said impatiently to the farmer, "Here, let me saw the log." He began with slow measured strokes, but before too long increased the tempo. The stroke went crooked, the saw caught. The city man said, "I guess I didn't do so well after all." The farmer replied, "It's because you allowed your mind to get ahead of the saw."

Sometimes you and I may have a tendency to do that --- to let our mind get ahead of the saw. Our mental attitude is so critical! Believe that you will be able to cope!!! Most importantly, concentrate on your powers rather than your problems. Live life one day at a time.

The second insight I want to share is the fact we are loved. Why is that so hard for some people to believe? There is a story of a missionary trying to translate the New Testament into the language of a primitive island people.

The language had very few abstract words, and the translator was having trouble with many theological concepts. One of them was the word “belief” for there was no such word in the tribal vocabulary.

While the translator was pondering how to translate “Believe in Jesus and be saved,” the door to his hut was opened and a messenger ran in. He had been running at top speed in order to deliver a telegram. In his exhaustion the man flung himself down on a rattan couch. He uttered a single island word meaning “to lean one’s whole weight on.” The missionary cried out “That’s it,” and he translated the passage in the Bible “Lean your whole weight on the Lord and be saved.”

So the second key to hold on when life gets you down is to recognize that there is someone who loves you, and upon whom you can share your burden. Isn’t that the point of Mark 1:38, which I read a few minutes ago? Jesus was able to heal all kinds of people with various diseases. Remember we read: “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came.” In the Gospels, God’s intention in Jesus Christ, is that we are offered the love that will never let us go. It is the love that can meet and overcome any situation.

This brings us to the third insight I want to share this morning. We need to hold on AND to let go. Our family doctor in Buck’s County, Pennsylvania, was also an elder in the Presbyterian Church. He used to tell his patients: “You have to learn to let go and let God give you the healing.” All of us need to learn how to release our worries, our fears, our guilt, our anger, our resentments, our weaknesses. There are times when we need to let go and let God.

Some years ago, Ron Levin, in Greenville, South Carolina, told: of a personal experience in Readers Digest Magazine. “The carpenter I hired to help me restore an old farmhouse had just finished up a rough day on the job. A flat tire had made him lose an hour of work, his electric saw had quit, and now his ancient pick-up truck had refused to start.

While I drove him home, he sat in stony silence. On arriving, he invited me to meet his family. As we walked toward the front door, he paused briefly at a small tree, touching the tips of the branches with both hands. Then, opening the door, he underwent an amazing transformation. His tanned face was wreathed in smiles, and he hugged his two small children and gave his wife a kiss.

Afterward, he walked me to the car. We passed the tree, and my curiosity got the better of me. I asked him about what I had seen him do, earlier. ‘Oh, that’s my ‘trouble tree,’” he replied. ‘I know I can’t help having them on the job, but one thing’s for sure - troubles don’t belong in the house with my wife and children. So I just hang’em on the tree every night when I come home; then in the morning, I pick them up again. ‘Funny thing is,’ he said smilingly, ‘when I come out in the morning to pick them up, there aren’t nearly as many as I remember hanging up the night before.’” Many people would profit from a tree like that.

We can thank the Good Lord that Christ does not take us out of the battle. The Lord does something better. He gives us trust and triumph in the battle. And he promises that at the end of the struggle a friendly hand will guide us into the presence of the One whose, “Well done, you good and faithful servant,” will glorify the battle scars.

Let each of us realize that no matter what situation we may be in ——

- We can hold on, knowing that our attitude affects our ability to cope
- And remember there are persons who love and respect and need us
- And lastly, learn the art of releasing your troubles. Let go! Let God!

CLOSING PRAYER: O God of tenderness, understanding, and sympathy; You kept faith with Job when he was despondent. You sent Jesus to heal the wounds of the afflicted in body, mind, and spirit. We give you thanks that even when we feel we cannot hold on, when despair overtakes us, you send your Holy Spirit to empower us to leave our fears behind. Amen.