

Sermon, April 3, 2022
Philippians 3:4-14 & John 12:1-8
“Kingdom Living: True Value”
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How many of you remember this poster? You know, as I wrote that this past week, I wondered are posters even a thing anymore? Or do we just create and find memes. For those of you of a certain age, Memes are like online posters. And it's amazing how quickly an event can create thousands of them. An announcement, a war, an incident at the Oscars. Millions of memes created within hours. For those of you under a certain age, posters are memes you put on your wall until your dad yells at you for using tape on the walls.

Regardless of where you land in that age gap, this was, in its day, one of the most popular posters. It was a huge seller, and you can see why. It's cute. It has a fluffy kitten on it. It's inspirational. Don't give up, keep holding on. Now, you can see why that combination for young high schoolers, or middle schoolers would be very popular. Cute combined with a message to not give up even when you are at the end of your rope, keep holding on. Pretty inspirational when you feel as if you are barely holding on. I imagine most teens feel that way at some point. It was so popular, you can still find these posters in various forms today. It's a timeless message, cute plus tenacity, don't give up, Hang on. I said a few moments ago this was a powerful message for teens who feel every now and then that life is slipping away from them. That their

grip is beginning to slip. But I wonder if it's fair to limit that. That's not just a teen or a youth issue, is it? Honestly, there are a lot of us who can associate with the cat. There are a lot of us struggling to hang on. I mean, aren't there days you feel like you are hanging on by the very tips of your fingers? Don't you ever feel as if your grip is beginning to slip? That encouragement to hang on hold on fits so many of us in our lives, doesn't it?

Perhaps because we don't like to let go. We are tenacious in our desire to hold on to things, to develop a death grip, if you will. We want to hold on. I was praying and looking for some ideas about holding on, and I did a quick search on a story of someone who won't let go of something. In a little less than 2 seconds, the search engine came up with over one billion results. Yes, I had to look at that a few times to make sure I saw that right, over a billion of examples of people who won't let go of something. And I suppose we can see that as inspirational, we are tenacious, we are strong, we can hang in there, baby.

But then I began to look at the results themselves. And honestly, they were heartbreaking. So many of the things people hold onto were really damaging. I'm holding on to a toxic relationship. I am holding onto fears I had in my childhood and I just can't seem to let go of them. I am holding onto my anger. I can't let go, and time after time it bubbles over and I act out inappropriately. I am holding onto a trauma that's keeping me from loving my family. I am holding onto a past hurt, something my spouse did, and it's keeping us from finding healing in our relationship. And I could go on and on. Obviously because there were over a billion results in less than two seconds.

It occurred to me that holding onto something is only a virtue if what you are holding onto is good. But it can be really damaging if you are holding onto something that hurts you. Sometimes letting go can be a blessing. Let's think about our cute cat poster. In the end, it's only good and inspirational depending on what's under the cat. If there is a high fall, if there are rocks below it, if it can't survive the fall, then holding on is good. But what if there is someone underneath the kitten who wants to catch it? Who wants to hold it, take the strain off of its muscles to give it rest and take it home. If the cat continues to hold on it, will it tire out, it can't eat or drink. It can't really live, it's just hanging there. There are times when it's better to let go. Sometimes what you find is better than what you hold onto.

That's a part of Paul's message to the church at Philippi we read just a few moments ago. Over the past several weeks, we have looked at what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Paul has shown us there are benefits to being a citizen of the kingdom of God and encourages us to enjoy them. But one of things Paul points out is that many of us want to have dual citizenship. I want the benefits of being a citizen of heaven, having love, peace, heaven, but I honestly would like to retain the rights to all of the things I

used to do and have. Paul tells us in this letter there is no such thing as dual citizenship. You can't hold onto your old life and enjoy all that God has for us now. At some point, you have to let go.

But how do we let go? In order to let go, you have to have faith and trust in our heavenly Father. You know when a child is somewhere high and their father says *jump I'll catch you*, they don't hesitate. It never occurs to them that they will not be caught. They just jump, often with great joy and glee. I don't know if I see many of us letting go of things in life with glee and joy. We do it with regret and worry. But I think this is why Jesus says we are to come to the Father as a child. To have a childlike faith. We simply need more Christians willing to let go of things in this life and jump with joy and shouts of glee into the arms of the Father. He will catch you.

Secondly, we must know we can let go and it will be Ok. I want everyone to hear that. It's Ok to let go of things that hurt you. You can let go, and it's going to be OK. There are times when we need Jesus to break our grip on things because we have held onto them so tightly and for so long that we don't even know if we can let go. You can let go of toxic relationships. You can let go of the trauma you have experienced in life that's keeping you from being able to trust other people. That anger that builds in your heart until it bubbles over? You can let go of that. It's possible for you to live and not be angry all of the time. That hurt caused by a spouse? It's possible to let it go. You can forgive and find healing.

Once we know who will catch us and we see it's possible that we don't have to hold onto those things any longer, we then can see the value. That's what Paul does. Paul has been asked, *but what about all you had, the most experienced young Pharisee in line to be the Chief Pharisee, freedom, money, power, now you are in prison*. And Paul says it's really quite simple. I weighed the value of what I was holding onto against the value of what I could have if I let go. And the treasure I received was far greater than anything the world had to offer me. In fact, I perceived everything as a loss in comparison to knowing Christ Jesus as my Lord.

In a few moments, we will be giving you an opportunity to come to the communion table. You know, it's almost impossible to carry things in your life and hold onto the body and blood of Jesus. So I want to ask you in all sincerity if there are things you are holding onto today, good or bad, that are keeping you from receiving all that God has for you? Are you tired of hanging on? Today, we want to give you the opportunity to let go.

First, have the faith of a child and know if you let go of whatever you are holding onto, God will catch you. Let go with glee and abandonment. Leap into the arms of your Father. Be glad for all that He has done and will do in your life.

Secondly, It doesn't matter how long you have held onto something. It doesn't matter what type of death grip you have on things that hurt you or are holding you back, God can break that grip and free you. You can let go. Your fingers might be numb, but God can break that grip. You can be free.

Allow God to open your eyes to see whatever you hold onto, even the good things fail in comparison to the riches God has for you. Your heavenly Father loves you. He will hold no good things from you. Let go and receive all the blessings He wants to pour into your life. Amen.