

**Tenth Sunday After Pentecost – Year A**  
**August 9, 2020**  
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**Church of the Good Shepherd, Dunedin, FL**  
**- SERMON -**

How many of you have ever played football? Tackle football?

A pastor by the name of David Simpson shared that, when he was a kid, he started playing football. He asked his coach if he could be the fullback, one of the running backs for the team. But after being tackled by a group of about eight guys, he decided he didn't want to TOUCH the ball anymore. At least – not for a while.

You see, there is one very basic element of football that is the key to victory. When you get knocked down, whether blocked or tackled, you have to get back up and continue the game.

No matter what level of football you play – midget league, neighborhood, or high school, college or pros – know this: You will get knocked down.

What do you do when you get knocked down? You get back up.

You don't have to play football to get knocked down. There are circumstances in life that knock us down quite often. Accidents, illnesses, finances, broken relationships, job stresses, pandemics, changes in our routine.

As we saw in our reading this morning, Elijah was knocked down by depression and self-pity. Queen Jezebel received word that he had killed her pagan prophets and so she sent her guys out to kill Elijah, so he ran for his life, and eventually ended up hiding in a cave.

It's interesting how the Lord works sometimes, isn't it? We go through our turmoil, we're frustrated, angry, scared, and if someone were to ask us what we would like God to do to fix all this, our answer may be quite different than what God actually does.

The Lord comes to Elijah and asks, "Why are you here, Elijah?" And he says, "I've been passionate for the Lord God because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars and murdered your prophets. And I'm the ONLY ONE left, and now they want to take my life, too!"

Poor Elijah. If we were there hearing him, there's a number of things we might say to him, right? Or do for him. But the Lord said, "GO OUT and stand at the mountain before the Lord. The Lord is passing by."

While this whole event is inspiring, one thing I picked up on is, after the wind and the earthquake and the fire, when he, then, heard the quiet sound, like a whisper, Elijah wrapped his face in his coat and he WENT OUT and stood at the cave's entrance."

Wait, back up. Didn't the Lord say to him earlier to "Go out and stand at the mountain before the Lord, that the Lord is passing by?" Apparently, he didn't "go out" when God told him to. Not until God's thin, quiet whisper.

And when a voice came to him again saying, "Why are you here, Elijah?" Elijah again says the same words, "I've been passionate for the Lord God because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars and murdered your prophets. And I'm the ONLY ONE left, and now they want to take my life too!"

Elijah is a great prophet. God has used him to perform miracles and do mighty things. But even Elijah is a human being. He has been threatened, scared, and brought low. Basically, as in football, he has been tackled. Can God still use him?

Yes, the Lord tells him to "Go back (the way you came from) through the desert to Damascus and anoint Hazael as king of Aram" – plus some others he was to anoint. He was being told to "Get back up". And God told him there were still "seven thousand whose knees HAVEN'T bowed down to Baal (the pagan god)." Elijah was NOT the only one left...

And we heard the story of Peter this morning. He and the other disciples had spent that previous day, as we heard last week, with five thousand men, plus women and children, coming to Jesus, who healed those who were sick and, I'm sure doing a lot of preaching. Late in the day, after the disciples served everyone and they all ate (from only five loaves of bread and the two fish), Jesus told them to go ahead in the boat to the other side while He spent time in prayer.

When evening came it says the boat, "fighting a strong headwind, was being battered by the waves and was already far away from land."

Who here have been on a boat in a storm being battered by waves? If you're one of those manning that boat, you know they were exhausted after working several hours to keep the boat in line.

And it wasn't until early in the morning before Jesus came to them, walking on the water. Exhausted, afraid of the storm, let alone seeing someone coming to them on the water, no wonder they were frightened until Jesus said, "Be encouraged! It's me. Don't be afraid."

And Peter, being Peter, said "Lord, if it's you, order me to come to you on the water." I envision Peter getting really excited with what he was seeing and thinking, "That is so cool, I want to try that!" Can't you see that?

Well, Jesus said, "Come."

So, Peter gets out of the boat and starts walking – on the water – toward Jesus. But he starts looking around, and I can just imagine what he was thinking. “For hours me and the boys have been battling this wind and these waves just to stay alive! What am I doing here?!” And down he goes. All they had experienced that day, though it was good, was tiring. And now, the exhaustion of the storm – he has been tackled. He’s down. “Lord, rescue me!”

And Jesus, being Jesus, immediately reached out and grabbed him, saying, “You man of weak faith! Why did you begin to have doubts?”

“You man of weak faith!” Oh my, and those words were written about him. People would remember that, even until today. Poor Peter. Always jumping too fast, and putting his foot in his mouth saying the wrong thing at the wrong time? Especially on the night when Jesus is taken to the High Priest before his crucifixion and he denies even KNOWING Jesus.

But even Peter is a human being, a fisherman. After all these things, can God still use him?

Oh yes, remember when Jesus said to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build my church"? Peter was the first leader of the church. He was the first to show the world non-Jews can be Christians. He preached of Christ everywhere he went and wrote two books in the Bible.

Have you ever seen those football games where the quarterback is knocked on his back and another player offers him his hand to help him back up? Well, that’s what God does for us. 1 Peter 5:6 says: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”

Whenever life has knocked us down, in faith we get back up. Whatever life brings our way, whatever tackles we endure, in faith we hold on to God’s mighty hand and in faith we get back up. .... As long as I’m in this body, I know that God’s not finished with me yet. Nor you.

Those around us are getting tackled just like we are. They need us. We need each other.

Paul wrote to the Romans in our reading this morning, “if you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’ and in your heart you have faith that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” But he also wrote, “So how can they call on someone they don’t have faith in? And how can they have faith in someone they haven’t heard of? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the good news.”

Remember to keep hold of God’s mighty hand. He WILL lift you up and lead you through the storms of life.

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