

"Arms"

Text: Mark 9:30-37

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

Dear Fellow Christians:

What comes to mind when you hear the word "arms"? Depends, doesn't it. The word can mean anything from "weapons" to "power" to "branches" to "parts of a ship" (yardarms) to "appendages." Context alone will tell you. When you add *"the Savior's"* to the word *arms*, for the Christian at least the phrase elicits almost universally positive impressions. What, after all, could ever be bad or negative about "the Savior's arms"?

Satan could probably tell us more clearly than anyone else about the other image of arms in connection with Jesus. Our Savior-God is the greatest ally any human being could ever hope to have. To rest securely "in his arms" *when he is your friend and ally* is the ultimate picture of comfort and peace. Yet for those who oppose him, "arms" represent a much different picture and the phrase describes a much different relationship. "God as your enemy" is not a place any human being wants to visit. His might, his power, his divine will represents a power that is simply irresistible.

Our text for today will guide us to a better understanding of both the negative and positive aspects of "the Savior's arms" – both the place where we want to be, and the place where we most certainly do not want to be. That text, given by God himself for our instruction and comfort, is found in the Gospel of Mark, the Ninth Chapter:

^{ESV} **Mark 9:30-37** *They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." ³² But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him. ³³ ¶ And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵ And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶ And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever*

receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

These are the words God has given us for our instruction, growth, and comfort. May we always approach them with the awe and reverence that comes in realizing that these are truly *God's* words. To this end we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

As you may have noted, we are taking a little different approach to this text (examining a different aspect of these inspired words) than you might ordinarily have expected. The more obvious message of this text has to do with a correct understanding of ambition, together with the fact that there is both a right and a wrong form of Christian ambition. The disciples clearly demonstrated the wrong kind of ambition when they engaged in their petty argument over who was or would be the greatest in God's kingdom. Jesus obviously and decisively dismissed and condemned their sinful ambition, and pointed them in a very different direction.

You will note, by the way, that he didn't offer a blanket condemnation of all ambition, but of their *sinful and misguided* ambition. From this, you and I now know that the sort of ambition that our God sees as good and wholesome is that *humble* ambition that seeks the advancement of others, rather than self. Jesus himself promoted the right kind of ambition in Matthew 6:33 when he told his followers to **"seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."** Note that we are to **"seek"** his kingdom and his righteousness. That is positive spiritual ambition. Again in 1 Corinthians 12:31 we are told to, **"...eagerly desire the greater gifts..."**

It ought then to be the *ambition* of every single one of us to be the greatest Christian he or she can possibly be. God has made it perfectly clear that, in connection with spiritual matters, he wants a thoroughly ambitious Church. God wants Christians who are never satisfied with their level of spiritual growth, never content with their ability to witness, never satisfied with their depth of knowledge and insight. He wants a Church that never considers itself big enough or active enough or sanctified enough or pious enough. God wants every single Christian to struggle relentlessly for spiritual greatness. So also in our text Jesus pointed to a different kind of ambition (a concept foreign to the world around us) when he said, **"If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."** Greatness, by God's own definition, comes by putting everyone else first.

This morning, however, we are examining a different aspect of our text – a rather poignant moment that you may have missed: **"And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.'"**

Talk about a lucky kid. Imagine having the very Son of God – Jesus Christ himself – gather you up in his arms and offer you his omnipotent love and protection. In a very real way, every child brought to the waters of baptism experiences that very thing. Through the Word of God connected to simple water, God himself has promised to enfold that one being baptized in his embrace and to declare that that is his own child – fully entitled to a lifetime of divine protection and care, and afterward an eternity in his presence. What an incredible blessing – absolutely without compare here on earth.

Those of you who have suffered – and I assume that includes all of you – should have some sense of just how blessed that little boy was in our text when the very Son of God and Savior of the world gathered him up in his arms. Not only has your God done the same in and for you in baptism, he offers much the same every day of your life. Who wouldn't want such a thing? Who hasn't yearned for such a thing – especially when the hard times knock us down and beat us up? Who wouldn't – who doesn't – long for the Savior's protecting arms?

And that's probably a big part of the problem. My own experience is that very few (if any) of us often think along such lines, let alone "yearn" for the embrace of our Savior God, even when times get tough. Human beings that are all wrapped up in what the world has to offer don't tend to think in terms of being with Jesus. To be sure, there are times when every Christian would like to be gone from this ugly place and with our Lord, but for the most part we tend to ask our God to fix the present so that we can enjoy ourselves without interruption and hardship. It's kind of the old *"I want to go to heaven, I just don't want to go tonight"* irreverence. What we most often seem to demand from our God is sort of like asking the fireman to turn up the volume on the television because the fire roaring through my house is making it too hard to hear. What we need is rescue from the world that is burning down around us. What we tend to seek is comfort in situations where we should never feel comfortable.

Do you recall from the reading of the text exactly what the disciples did

when Jesus asked them about the conversation they were having with each other while they walked along the road? They did nothing, answering Jesus not a word. Why? Because they were ashamed of their conduct. They were rightly embarrassed by their selfish worldliness and their sinful ambition.

This is the sort of position in which no Christian wants to find himself. Ever. What a terrible situation to be in – one in which we are too embarrassed to answer our Lord honestly concerning what we had just been doing, thinking, or saying. And yet we find ourselves in that very spot more often than we care to admit. How often, in your day-to-day life, would just as soon *not* have Jesus right there beside you? How often would you just as soon be hidden from your Savior's sight so that you could "get away with" whatever you happened to be doing at that particular moment? Think about that for just a bit and the true horror of sin begins to dawn on us. Something is very wrong in our Christian walk and attitude if the presence of our Savior God would put a crimp in our style.

At such times a different image of the arms of the Savior should present itself – the image of the Lord God of Sabaoth; the God of War. No one who has come to know the truth *about* his God ever wants to be separated *from* his God, not even for an instant. No sane human being wants God for an enemy. The words of the Apostle Paul come to mind in Galatians 6:7-8: **"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption..."** We tend to not want to hear about the sort of God who, in the words of the hymn writer, *"made bare his arms to fight"* – at least not when we are on the receiving end of his wrath and displeasure. When we are indulging the sinful flesh, we don't want to think about the God who sees all, who hates sin, and who is *never* mocked or deceived. We don't want to be the recipient of divine justice when we are the law-breakers; when we are the self-serving, pleasure-seeking malcontents. Then we don't want the Savior's arms. We want to be left alone.

That, of course, is a really bad place to be. The very *last* thing we should ever want from our God is to be without him – even for an instant. You and I know full well that we will be devoured in an instant by Satan if we push our only source of hope and protection from our lives. Without the loving embrace of our Savior, we are absolutely and hopeless doomed for all eternity. And yet that is exactly what sin threatens to do in our lives. It causes us to hide from

our Lord – to wish ourselves out of his *sight and gone from his mind*.

And so, like the little child that wanders from his parents – only to be called back when danger threatens – so too our Lord calls us back, time after time, and again our Savior wraps his arms around us and assures us that he will, with perfect consistency, deliver us from evil. His very life's work was to rescue us from ourselves and our own tragic foolishness.

Picture in your mind the image of little children in the loving embrace of their Savior. No matter how old, no matter how busy, no matter how important you are or how unimportant you are (in the eyes of the world), *that* is the position you and I want to find ourselves in every single moment of our lives. We don't just want Jesus to be a part of our lives; we want him to be the very center, the focus, the heart and soul of all that we do and all that we are. We want hearts that long to be with Jesus above any other goal or desire.

Know too that if that is not the case with you right now, it can be. Jesus himself wills it to be so. He never stops reaching out to us with the forgiveness he earned for us on Calvary's cross. It is his divine will to have a closer, more intimate relationship with you.

Be wise enough then to understand the circumstances in which you find yourself. If you find it a bit difficult to picture yourself not only in such a Christ-centered situation, but altogether content and blissfully happy in such a situation, know that Satan has caused you to wander and to lose focus. Stop. Rest. Listen carefully and you will hear the voice of your Lord, gently calling you back to that closer walk with him. His holy Word is where you will hear him, where he promised to visit with you and comfort you. There you will find him.

Where else could we, would we, ever really want to be? Jesus once asked his disciples if they too wanted to leave him – as had so many of those fair-weather disciples who had become disillusioned with a Savior who did not offer them a life of ease and pleasure on earth. The disciples responded: ***"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*** (John 6:68-69) So also we say with Peter: ***"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*** (Acts 4:12) When therefore we have Jesus Christ, we absolutely can lack no good thing.

Thank you, Lord, for your gift of life and salvation. Keep us ever by your side, and grant also to each of us a desire for the sort of relationship with you that you long to have with each of us. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 11:18-20** ¹⁸ The Lord made it known to me and I knew; then you showed me their deeds. ¹⁹ But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more." ²⁰ But, O Lord of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause.

^{ESV} **James 3:13-4:10** ¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. 4:1 ¶What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

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The 18th Sunday after Pentecost – September 23, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 34 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"My Soul Now Bless Thy Maker"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Jeremiah 11:18-20) Our first lesson shows the reaction of sinful man to God's word. The prophet Jeremiah brought God's call to repentance to his fellow Israelites. Instead of receiving God's word, they wanted to kill the messenger, but God reveals their plot to Jeremiah. The application here is that our sinful nature also resists God's word. As we hear these words, may God reveal our own reluctance and resistance, and the grace to overcome it.

Psalm 85 (Supplement page 40) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (James 3:13-4:10) The Holy Spirit through James here reminds us that we make ourselves miserable and cause untold hardship to ourselves and others whenever we struggle for the material things that God does not intend for us to have. Wanting this world's material things *above God and His will* puts us at odds with God Himself. So James reminds us in this reading that we can't have it both ways. To be a "friend of the world" makes us an enemy of God. God grant us a desire for that far greater relationship with him.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5 (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 385 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Now I have Found the Firm Foundation"

The Sermon – Text: Mark 9:30-37 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Arms"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -305 (Stanzas 1 & 3) (Red Hymnal)

"Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 34 (Stanza 4) (Red Hymnal)

"My Soul Now Bless Thy Maker"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (48) Average (42)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and Coffee Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and Coffee Hour

CLC News – Pastor James Albrecht is considering the call to Our Redeemer's of Red Wing MN. Pastor David Schaller is considering the call to Trinity of Spokane WA. The ILC Call Committee has called Dr. Daniel Schierenbeck to the faculty of ILC.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet this morning during the fellowship hour.

Schedule – Please note that we return to our full (non-summer) schedule this week, with Confirmation and Midweek Bible Study at the regular times.