

SERMON FOR AUGUST 26, 2018
MISSION FESTIVAL
THEME: RESCUERS
TEXT: PROVERBS 24:11

Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.

In the name of Jesus:

Does the name Jeff Hogan ring a bell? Hogan used to work at WBNS 10TV in Columbus, first as the head sports anchor, and then as the news anchor for the morning and then weekend news. He was a familiar face around Columbus, and was known to be physically fit; in fact, he was the spokesman for 10 TV's Commit to be Fit Initiative. Hogan was physically active, a tri athlete, one who participates the grueling competition of swimming, biking, and running a race, which is called a Triathlon. He left Columbus in April, to take a job as a news anchor at WRAL in Raleigh, North Carolina. Hogan made the news recently, but not in a way that one would expect a physically fit person would make the news.

Late in July, Hogan was bodysurfing off of the coast of Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina. He was spending time with his family and friends, when the unthinkable occurred. The ocean conditions at Wrightsville were rough, and the lifeguards were flying the red flags to warn the beachgoers of dangerous surf. But no lifeguard thought to prohibit anyone from getting into the water. The waves were high and the currents strong, somewhat perfect conditions for an experienced body surfer such as Jeff Hogan. But Wrightsville Beach is a dangerous area. Already this year 12 people have drowned in the ocean waters off of North Carolina,

and the ocean waters are known for riptides. Those riptides have a reputation in North Carolina, in that they are known as drowning machines.

As he was bodysurfing, a wave slammed Hogan facedown into a sandbar. He knew he was in danger. Hogan never lost consciousness but he could not move. Hogan sensed that he was in deep trouble, and that the end was near. I'll let Hogan explain the situation in his own words: "I was completely paralyzed facedown in the water, I saw that white light for a split second. I heard those bubbles rushing by me and I thought for a split second this is how it happens. And then I was like no, no, this is not how it happens today."

Jeff Hogan's life was spared; he was saved from certain death. How? Hogan's daughter was nearby, saw what had taken place, and she pulled him out of the water enough so that he could breathe, and then others helped pull him from the surf. If not for the rescuing action of his daughter and others, Hogan would have certainly died. But now he lives! After several weeks in the hospital he is back at the anchor desk, thankful to be alive, but also with the knowledge that his life was spared because someone cared to rescue him.

God says in His Holy Word: "Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter." You and I have been rescued from death, from sin, Satan, death and Hell. Doesn't the Bible say: "None is righteous, no not one; no one understands, no one seeks God." We are all sinners from birth. Daily our hearts stray from God, sometimes our ways are not God's ways, we don't honor God with the choices we make, the language we use, the thoughts we think. There is no true fear of God. We are really dead men, women,

and children who walk daily in ways that are not pleasing to God. We pass by those in need; to the one who needs to hear about Jesus our lips are silent. We are more concerned about our own needs than the needs of others. We say we love God and yet we carry hatred in our hearts. We are really and truly wretched people, who deserve no good thing from God.

But God is rich in mercy! Because of the great love he has for you and me and all people, even though we deserve death due to our sins, God has rescued you and me from the clutches of sin, Satan and death. We who daily live in sin and are at times drowning in sin have been saved by a free gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ. It is by grace you have been saved, not because of what you have done, but because of what Jesus has done God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him has eternal life. At the right time in history God sent His Son Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, born under the Law to keep the Law perfectly in the place of sinners, including you and me. And it pleased Almighty God to rise up His Son Jesus, to be crucified on a cross, to be punished for the sins of the world. God the Father chose in eternity to damn His Son Jesus on the cross, for cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree. Jesus' words from the cross, where He cries out, "My God My God why have you forsaken Me?" Signify to you and me and everyone that God the Father damned His Son Jesus for the sins of the entire human race. And it pleased God to raise His Son Jesus on the third day, giving Him victory over sin, Satan, and death.

God has rescued you from sin, Satan, and death in His Son Jesus Christ. In the waters of Baptism. Remember what Dr. Luther writes about Baptism in the

Small Catechism? “What Benefits does Baptism give? It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and give eternal salvation to all who believe this as the words and promises of God declare.” You have been rescued! For the Bible says: “³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his...

“For He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

God has rescued you from sin, Satan, and death, and now has given to you the mission and purpose of joining together as a congregation with your fellow brothers and sisters to work together to bring this life saving message of God’s salvation to all who need rescued from sin, Satan, and death. This is the joyful privilege that you and I have, to speak about God’s love and mercy in Christ to those who live in our communities and neighborhoods who are drowning in sin and unbelief. Many live in the fear of death, they are anxious about their future, they have questions such as does God really exist, and if He does, who is He, does He know me, does He care for me? And God has given to you and me the answers to the questions they have, for the answer to all of these questions are found in Jesus! This is what the Apostle Paul writes about when he says in Second Corinthians: “¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have

died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling^[b] the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” And so we are fellow rescuers, people who have been saved by Christ to share how God rescues sinners in Christ! That is our purpose, that is our mission, and that is our work.

Last summer off the coast of Florida Roberta Ursay and her family were out swimming in the ocean. She noticed that her two sons, ages 8 and 11 , were swimming too far out into the ocean. She called for them to come closer to the shore, but because of the power of the surf, they could not come in, rather, they kept drifting farther and farther out into the sea. Unless someone could save them, they were certainly going to drown. She began to wade out into the water, but the boys were still too far out to reach them. Her husband and other family members waded out to help but it was to no avail. The boys, and now the members of the family, all were about to perish.

But there were people on the shore who noticed the peril this family was in and they decided to join together to attempt an unheard of rescue mission. Soon, a human chain was formed, and 80 people, many of whom did not know one another, joined hands together to form a link from the safety of the shore to those who were about to drown at sea. Some of the 80 people couldn't swim but that was no excuse, they joined in the rescue mission. Joining hands and reaching out to about 100 yards off the coast, they worked together to save every person who was stranded, saving 9 people in all who were stranded in fifteen feet of water. One of those who were rescued said: "I am so grateful, these people were God's angels that were in the right place at the right time. I owe my life and my family's life to them. Without them, we wouldn't be here.'

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, God has saved you in Jesus Christ. He has placed you here, at this time and in this place, rescued from sin, Satan and death in Christ to share the life-giving message to those who are going to perish eternally in the fires of Hell. You and I owe our life to Jesus, for without Him we wouldn't be here. May God the Holy Spirit so move each of us that we might be so grateful for the salvation that is ours in Christ, that we would work together to share the message of Jesus. For now is the day of salvation, now is the time to join in the rescue mission of sharing the Good News of Jesus!

Amen