

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
John 10:11-16  
April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Everyone always wonders how the 72<sup>nd</sup> St. parsonage got its address... 6666. Pastor Krueger use to tell people that their youngest daughter Krista chose that number. Not true. Pastor Krueger did. You see, for many years the church and the parsonage shared the same address. When it was decided to separate the two dwellings with different postal numbers, Pastor Krueger was told that he can choose any even number between 6600 (the address of house to the east) and 6700 (the church's address). Now me, I would have chosen 6650. Sounds rational, yes? But not the cankerous R.R. Krueger. He thought it would be fun to choose such an "almost" scandalous number like 6666.

And for the past 11 years, when the Arnolds have to give out the address for the parsonage, there is always a collective gasp for the other people. "Oh my, that is an evil number. I just can't believe that's your address." And we have to remind them... It's not the number of the Beast found in the Book of Revelation. As a matter of fact, its 6000 numbers off from that deplorable devil number (I'm a pastor and I can even do that math in my head). No, instead of an address with a number that represents the devil, we have an extra 6... but that seems bad enough. Even that number 6 is a number we don't want to hear.

But speaking of the number of the Beast... did you notice the number of our opening hymn? Sure you did. Hymn number 666. We know that some buildings will not include a 13<sup>th</sup> floor because that number is believed to be unlucky and people don't want to even step foot in such a place. So why didn't a Christian hymnal like our Lutheran Service Book skip the number 666? Won't that ruin the hymnal? Isn't that bad luck?

I should tell you something... It was very intentional by the hymnal committee who was in charge of the numbering of the hymns to make sure we have a hymn 666. It was very intentional regarding "what" hymn that would be. It's not a mistake that the evil "Foe" is actually part of the title and that title reads thusly: O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe. This... all of you... is Christ's little flock. And we sang this morning, **"O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe who madly seeks your overthrow; Dread not his rage and power. And though your courage sometimes faints, His seeming triumph over God's saints Lasts but a little hour."**

Oh it is true. The devil gets his ugly claws on us from time to time. We see it in our world. We watch the news and hear about a horrible murder or some other terrible crime someone did and we call that person... pure evil. We think of the devil. We think of other terrible things... the threat of wars from dictators and we think of pure evil and the devil. But we would not think of the devil when we talk about the people that we know... not the people here, not you are me... right?

Why not? The devil loves to play games with you. He loves to put the low hanging fruit before your eyes and make you grab it. He loves to go after people like you the most. You know why? Because He doesn't have you. Just like any of us, we want what we can't have. And so, beloved in the Lord, you are the most susceptible to temptation. You are the one who has must watch yourself the most. You are the one the devil looks to topple. And he wants that victory. He wants your fall from grace. He wants you get mad so you will get even. He wants you to give into temptation and ignore God's will. The devil wants you!!! Don't let him have you.

So hear now the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza of hymn 666... **"As true as God's own Word is true, Not earth nor hell's satanic crew Against us shall prevail. Their might? A joke, a mere façade!"**

**God is with us and we with God, Our victory cannot fail.** The hymn writer reminds us that because God's Word is true, the devil is sure to see his defeat. Compared to God's almighty and everlasting power the strength of the devil is a joke. He can't hold a candle to the Lord's power, His love for you. His undying faithfulness to you. Your complete assurance of the forgiveness of sins. The devil shall not prevail... this is good news, beloved in the Lord.

So now we listen to the voice of our Savior in the Gospel text appointed for this day, "*I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me... I lay down my life for the sheep.*" What comfort it is to know that we belong to the Good Shepherd... that He would do anything for us and even die for us. He would protect us against danger, against wild animals, as shepherd's sometimes had to do. In 1 Samuel, David tells King Saul how at one time he had to fight off a lion and a bear for the sake of his father's sheep (1 Samuel 17:34-36). And so if David, a shepherd boy who would protect the sheep of his father Jesse by putting his life on the line for them, how much more will your brother Jesus, protect His Father's sheep? Not just against wolves, bears or lions... but against the attacks of the devil himself. He will fight for you, the imperfect sheep. He will die for you, imperfect sheep. You will live because He fights and dies for those He loves. You, a sinner, becomes holy before the Heavenly Father because your Jesus loves you that much. He put Himself in the way of the devil and he will never take you.

A little further along in John chapter 10, Jesus speaks yet another word of comfort for you. He mentions, "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand... My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*" Did you hear that? No one will snatch them out of my hand, says our Lord. Even the devil? Yes, even the devil can't take you away. This does not mean that you cannot lose your faith. It's true, you can. So, guard your faith. Feed your faith. Come to the communion rail and partake of that which nourishes your faith. This is what our Lord wants for you... This is how He keeps you in the palm of His hands. Beloved, do not forsake the gathering of His people here in this place. He feeds you here. You need what He gives you here.

But, beloved in the Lord, by grace through faith, you are not outside of God's grace. You are in the palm of God's hand. NO ONE can snatch you out of the hand of the Lord. So we can sing our opening hymn: "O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe." In Christ, there is no reason to fear him. The devil will not have you.

So, beloved, don't worry about numbers like the parsonage address... or the number six... or any other number. You are guarded by your Lord. You belong to Him. By the way, the symbolic number represents the devil because the number 6 is one short of the heavenly number 7 often found in the Bible. 6 is a "falling short" of seven and there is a warning regarding falling short. Why are there three 6s? Maybe because there are three persons of the Trinity... a threefold falling short.

But worry not, beloved in the Lord. You don't fall short. Because you have Christ and Christ has you. Worry not, because Christ descended into hell after death on the cross, put his finger under the nose of the devil and said, "You lose, I win." And because the devil lost... because our Savior won... so do you! That mark of the beast is not on you. That mark of the beast can harm you none. You have Christ and His death. And best of all, Jesus our Savior has you... He loves you and will never let you go. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.