

✠ Luke 5:1-11 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

I, for one, would rather suffer than tell anyone that I'm sick or have a disease or ailment. I've been known to be curled up in a ball on the couch, moaning because of the pain of kidney stones, and answer the phone with a cheery hello, and to the question of the caller, "How'ya doin'?" I respond with the lie, "Fine, thanks." And when my loving wife tells me to go to the doctor I stupidly ask why.

Some of us would rather die than ask our siblings for monetary help, or worse, mom and dad or some uncle. They still see us as children, depending on them and in need of their constant care and mothering. We don't want to be seen like that. We want them to see us as able to make it on our own. We want them to see that we're self-sufficient, good with our money, and always healthy. More than that, most of us would rather suffer all manner of hardship than ask our children for help. If we ask them then we can no longer claim that father knows best. We'd be admitting to failure and dependence and incompetence. We'd be seen as weak and inferior. Repent. Those who ask for help are not weak and pathetic, they're honest. And we should be overjoyed that they ask for help as another opportunity to show our love for them as Christ loves us. Moreover, we should not be afraid to ask for help, as the Scriptures say, "Bear one another's burdens."

The reason we hide our failures and our foibles is because we don't want those things to define us in the eyes of others. We don't want people to look at our disease or deformity; we want them to look at us. We don't want people, every time they see us coming or our name pop up on the caller ID, to say, "So-and-so's lookin' for handouts." We don't want our poverty to define us, and so we hide it by not asking for help, or when we do ask for help, making up all sorts of excuses why this predicament is not really our fault. We hide the truth so that people will see us as we want to be seen, not as we really are.

And where this is really evident and harmful is with our children. We want others to see us as good parents and so we seek to please their ideas more than God's. We raise our children how the world tells us children should be raised, and not how God's Word tells us to raise them. We don't want to be seen as sticks-in-the-mud or as unfair, so we let them skip the Divine Service as many times as they want for what's important to them, and tell them that it doesn't matter what you do as long as you love God and do your best and keep thinking church is important. But we betray our words when we let things that are not so important pull us away from God's Word and His Church. For truly the best thing to do is to attend the preaching of God's Word and to receive His sacraments, given for you. But all too often we hide behind busy schedules and unnecessary commitments or petty injuries to our pride.

And when our children are grown and gone, we're afraid that their mistakes and wayward living will reflect poorly on us, so we say, "That's not how they were raised." We blame them for their mistakes, hiding from the fact that God has given us to them as fathers and mothers over them. Our whole goal is to not be blamed for their shortcomings and poor judgment, and so we treat them like they don't listen to us when really they listen well, doing as we do and speaking as we speak. And rather than confess our sins and actually becoming corrective, we abuse them by simply punishing them, or worse, ignoring them, and eventually we even expect them to do bad in school, to make poor grades, or to go to principle's office; and our only hope for them is that they don't get pregnant and that they stay out of jail. And children are great at measuring up to what we expect of them.

The Lord disciplines those whom He loves. Disciple your children in the way they should go and when they are old they shall not depart from it. The opposite is equally true: train your child in wrong and harmful ways, and when he is old he will follow the path of destruction. For God will visit the iniquities of the fathers to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Him and break His commandments, therefore we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them, but train our children in the instruction and fear of the Lord. Discipline does not mean punish. It means to train, to instruct, and it is hard and takes time and energy and a lot of effort. But it is, above all else, your vocation in life. You are not first a farmer or teacher or plumber or pastor. Even if you were that before you were a father, you are first and foremost a father, and everything you do is seen through that light. If you don't train your children, then their screwed up life is on your head, not theirs.

Don't assume that the teachers will teach or that the sermon will get through to them or that Confirmation is enough. You do it; it is your vocation. All these other things come from your God-given, God-ordained office as parent. These other things are optional; you instructing your child is not. You sit down with them at night and teach them the ways of the Lord by praying the Our Father with them; by reciting the Creed with them; by singing the hymns of the Church together; by reading the Scriptures together; even by hanging crucifixes over their beds as a reminder of God's love for them so that when they lay down at night and rise in the morning they will know to whom they belong. Or does John 3:16 not give a picture of the Crucified Lord given for their sins and yours? Then they will know and believe that they are His children and they will yearn for the things of their Father in heaven. You will create in your children a hunger and desire for the things of God so that they will not despise preaching or His Word, but will gladly and eagerly come and be fed with the Bread of Heaven. And when they have children of their own, they will raise them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and they shall be a blessing to you. For the Lord promises grace and every blessing to those who honor and keep His commandments. Therefore we should love and trust in Him and gladly do as He commands and instruct our children in the fear and instruction of the Lord.

And for those of you who say, "Just wait, Pastor, your kids are young yet," repent. I am not judging you. I am giving you God's Word and will. If you are condemned, it is God's Word that judges and condemns you. Confess your sins and seek forgiveness and the Lord who is merciful will forgive you. Then you will be even better prepared to instruct your children, no matter how old or young they are, in the forgiveness of your heavenly Father who sees you as His dear child whom He loves, disciplining you in His ways and with His Word. Do not neglect the chastisement of the Almighty, for as it is written, "a fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion" (Prov. 18:2), but praise Him that He loves you enough to chastise you and correct you and bring you ever closer to Himself. As it is also written, "A fool despises his father's instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is prudent."

The flesh would rather die in the dark than be exposed by the light. And that is why Peter begged the Lord to depart from him. Peter was afraid. He was afraid of his sins. He was afraid of Jesus. You can hide from men, you can convince them that you are a good and decent person, you can fool them, if only but for a time. But when God meets you face to face you cannot hide anymore. You cannot throw excuses up and hope that He will turn a blind eye. For in Him is no darkness nor deceit. He does not hide the fact that you are sinful. Just as He did not hide Peter's sin by saying, "Oh no, Peter. Don't be so hard on yourself. You're alright, just a little pigheaded at times." No, He didn't reject Peter's confession of sin; rather He let him confess his sin because confession is good for the soul. Jesus doesn't hide that we are sinful. Instead He makes it known throughout the whole world by dying a public death,

crucified before all, for the remission of all your sins. Do not call God a liar by trying to convince others that you have no sin. His light shines brightly into the darkest recesses of your heart and illumines you for who you truly are: a sinful man.

And that is scary. It is scary because even the heathen knows what poor Peter knew, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Sinful men are destroyed by a holy God. Depart from us Lord, for we are sinful men, and your presence will consume us like stubble and burn us like chaff. That is why men stay away from Church and preachers fail to preach the whole counsel of God. Oh, they may sit in the pews, and the preachers may turn a good phrase, but they are afraid. They are afraid of what others will think of them if they become too zealous for the things of God. But more than that, they are afraid of their sins. If they come to church it's a least a quasi confession that they are sinful men seeking the forgiveness of God. And that is too much. First because they don't want to be seen as weak, so they convince themselves and others that they can have a relationship with God without His Word and Church, and second because they think that if they come here that God will not forgive them, but burn them to ash, destroying them. And so by not coming to hear the Word of the Lord, or by coming and never hearing, they tell the Lord to depart from them.

But our Lord does not depart. He does not leave you without instruction and discipline; leaving you in the darkness to die. He leads you by His shepherd's staff to quiet waters and green pastures. He restores your soul. He says to you "Do not be afraid. I have not come to destroy you, but to redeem you. I have not come that you might die for your trespasses; but that you should live. I do not seek your life; I seek to give you life."

Come, you who are chastised by the Father, come and drink from the River of Life and eat the Bread of Heaven. Come and be refreshed in the pool of salvation, in the courts of the Lord's House. Come, do not be afraid, your sins are forgiven.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠