

Jesu Juva

“Depart: No. Mercy: Yes!”
Text: Luke 5:1-11 (1 Peter 3:8-15)

“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

Peter got it exactly right. When faced with the raw, almighty power of God, He melted. In our liturgy during the summer months, we say it this way, quoting the Psalms: *If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand* (Ps 130:3-4 NIV)? The answer: no one. From Adam hiding after his sin (Gen 3:8), to Moses at the burning bush afraid to look at God (Ex 3:6), to Isaiah saying “*Woe is me!*” after seeing God in a vision (Isaiah 6:5), to Peter, this is the reality for us sinners. Think of the last time you saw a really severe thunderstorm. (You don’t have to think long because we’ve had quite a few of them this summer.) When they’re in the distance, they’re not too frightening. The rumbles are low and the flashes at a distance. But when they’re right on top of you, with blinding flashes and deafening cracks, who isn’t awestruck and a bit on edge in the presence of such raw power? That, and a hundred times worse, is the terror Peter felt and the terror we should feel as sinners being in the presence of the raw, almighty power of God.

But, you say, many today have no fear of God. Many today thumb their noses at God and care little of God. Many today even make demands of God and accuse God of doing wrong and being mean and unjust. And that is true. Because God’s raw, almighty power is still rumbling and flashing in the distance. When it is upon us, when the Last Day comes, those who are bold now won’t be so bold then. Then they will be like Adam, Moses, Isaiah, and Peter; but then it will be too late. When, as Peter wrote in his letter in the first reading, *the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*

But now is not that time. Jesus does not depart from Peter and does not tell Peter depart. Instead He says, ***Do not be afraid.*** God is not here to destroy but to save. God is here on a mission of mercy. Make no mistake about it - it is the same almighty God who created the world and everything in it, whose raw, almighty power is terrifying. But now He is robed in mercy. Now He is robed in human flesh. Now He is here to use that power *for us*, not against us. So as with Adam, Moses, and Isaiah, God comforts His frightened child; swaddles and comforts him with His Word. ***Do not be afraid.*** And as always, just as His Word stills storms and makes fish jump into nets, so His Word does what it says and calms Peter’s troubled heart.

So while Peter was right, He was also wrong. For while yes, the words we sinners utter *should be Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!* the words Jesus invites us now to utter and that we should utter are: *Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.* And merciful He is. That’s why He was born and took on human flesh. That’s why He was in the boat that day with Peter and the others. That’s why He then tells Peter that He is going to use

him to catch men now, proclaiming this message of God's mercy. And most of all, that's why He ascended the cross and died. Jesus used His almighty power as God not to destroy us, but to save us. To save us from what really is threatening and trying to destroy us - namely, our sin, death, and the devil.

But, you say, many today have no fear of these things. Many today revel in their sins, look to death as an answer, and mock the devil. And that too is true. The long, corrupting effect of sin has made us too dumb to even fear what we should. But when the frightening storm of evil rear its ugly head, when sin does rise up and punch us in the gut, when death comes upon us suddenly or in a long, drawn out struggle, when we see things like Isis and its raw evil, what then?

Do not be afraid. That word of Jesus is still our refuge. *Do not be afraid* of death, Jesus says, for I have defeated it in my resurrection. *Do not be afraid* of evil or the devil, for I have kicked down the gates of hell - they have no power over you. *Do not be afraid* of your sin, for I have atoned for your sins - all of them; every last one of them - on the cross, and I forgive you. *Do not be afraid*, for you are my child. I baptized you and feed you and am with you. And you will be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:43). The stronger One has fought for us and won.

And that is ***the reason for the hope that is in us.*** Again in his letter, Peter said to ***always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.*** Here's what that verse doesn't mean: that you have to have all the answers to all the questions anyone will ever ask you about God! *Who does?* And that's not where our hope lies, in our knowledge and knowing all the answers. No, our hope is in Jesus. Our hope lies in His mercy and forgiveness. Our hope is in the fact that God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son to be in the boat with us, to go to the cross for us, and to have mercy upon us. And that we can speak. Some will hear and some won't, but that's not up to us. We speak Jesus and let the Spirit do the rest. And He will. For God is merciful. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's why He's here. That's why we're here. That is our hope.

And when Peter had been thus mercied, Luke tells us that ***when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.*** You may not have been called to do the same now. Maybe now you've been mercied to follow Jesus as you take care of your family, or be a blessing in your work, to pray for those in need, or be generous with your time. Jesus calls us to those things too.

But the day is coming when you will leave everything and follow Him - when you will leave the things of this world behind and follow Him to Paradise; when He calls you from the grave and takes you home. *Do not be afraid* of that day either, child of God. For in Jesus, what is true for Him is true for you. And what is true for Him - and so for us in Him - we sang in the Psalm earlier:

*Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.
For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.
You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Ps 16:9-11).*

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.