

## **Matthew 4:12-25**

Following a little one around the house often means restoring those things which he upsets with his busy little hands...catching and setting upright a lamp that is about to fall, sweeping up a vase that did fall, calming down a cat after its tail has been pulled, putting the rug back by the door, and so on. Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. I have to wonder if part of the joy mom's and dad's have is hoping that their little one, some day, has a little one just like him.

In this sense we are God's little ones. Using Luther's saint/sinner terminology, we surely are, to God, holy little terrors. There isn't a day that goes by in which we are not upsetting, breaking, hurting one thing after another in His house. God's house, we can say, is the world He created. And if you think your house is neat and tidy, compared to God's house, it's a pig sty. At least His house used to be in order. It was perfect in every way until we little ones came in and began upsetting and demolishing pretty much everything.

There comes a point when mom has had enough. The time has come for discipline. She grabs her little one, puts him in his room, and shuts the door. He may scream like a banshee, but she does not cave. He's going to stay in his room. Her determination is greater than his desire to roam free in the house.

This point and time came for God in the year 722 B.C. His little ones were tearing His house apart. His people up in Zebulun and Naphtali refused to behave themselves. And so God sent them to their room. He brought in the Assyrians. They captured God's people and took them off into slavery. They screamed like banshees all the way to this foreign land. But God was determined. It was time for discipline.

Unrepentant sin does not go unpunished. Zebulun and Naphtali were yesterday; America may be tomorrow. This nation, of which we are a part, cannot keep mocking God and expect to get away with it. As a nation, we have not been pulling the tails of cats; far worse, we have been murdering millions of defenseless babies in the womb. We are not breaking lamps and vases; we, as a nation, are destroying the sanctity of marriage which God established between one man and one woman. These are not sins of weakness. These are sins in which we, as a nation, are standing up to God and challenging Him to His face! Is it time for discipline? God alone knows. If our nation is, in the near future, sent to its room in punishment, the sins of the majority will cause even the few who love God to suffer severe consequences.

But even the righteous cannot claim to be perfect little angels. The pain and suffering we deal with is often what we bring on ourselves. Even after our older brother is sent to his room by an angry mom, we do not learn from this, but we pick up where he left off. We're all guilty of tearing God's house apart. None of us behaves the way God expects and demands.

And if any of us thinks we can get away with it, we need to think again. Unrepentant sin simply will not go unpunished. If you or I think we can come to church on Sunday and repent, and then go back to our life of sin on Monday, we are unrepentant. God's punishment is coming. And we are living in a darkness that is very deep.

Thank God that into this darkness Jesus came. Isaiah prophesied seven centuries before it happened that He who is the Light would enter into the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. The Savior comes out of the

very people who have been tearing God's house apart. From these holy little terrors comes He who is the Holy One of God.

And look what He does. He goes throughout Galilee, formerly the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, and heals every disease and every affliction. They bring all the sick to Jesus and He heals all of them - epileptics, paralytics, the sick, the diseased, even those oppressed by demons.

Do you see what Jesus is doing? He is restoring God's creation. He is putting everything in God's house back in place. Everything that our grubby little hands have broken, demolished, and upset, Jesus is making whole again.

No mere man could do this. But God, who is born of a woman, and yet remains God - He comes into that house which we had turned upside down, and He sets everything right side up.

And He does more. He opens the door to our room - the room in which we have been sitting in darkness, and He calls us out of the darkness. And then He enters the darkest place of all. Jesus goes to Calvary's cross to enter the deep darkness of hell - the punishment you deserve, I deserve. But He does not cry like a banshee. He opens not His mouth. In silence He bears the pains of our sin.

The god of disorder is Satan. He manifest himself in all the disorder in our world and in our own life. But Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. What He was doing throughout Galilee in restoring God's creation, He does in your life today.

It begins in your Baptism where Jesus healed you from the devil's oppression by raising you from death to life. It continues through the preaching of the Word where Jesus shines with the light of the truth into the darkness in which we hide. At His Table and through His words of Absolution, Jesus restores you as God's new creation by forgiving your sins and creating a clean heart within you. Jesus sweeps away all the brokenness that you have caused...broken lives, broken hearts, broken marriages. Nothing, and no one, is too broken for Jesus. He does not excuse your sins; He takes responsibility for them, and His heavenly Father forgives you of them.

And now watch what He does. Walking by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus calls disciples to follow Him. Now, instead of following after them, like a mother following after her rampaging little one, Jesus calls His little ones to follow Him around the house. You are called in the same way. Being a disciple of Jesus is not a license to sin. You are not called to be little terrors running around God's creation living as you please. You've broken enough vases. You've pulled enough tails. And so have I. You and I are called to a life of obedience. And this life is one in which following Jesus is not optional. Coming to hear His Word and receive His Sacrament is not optional. Keeping ourselves pure by shunning lust and greed is not optional. It's time to give up the little terror in us and live a life of holiness.

If you think that you can't do it, you're wrong. Jesus helps you. Those who do not follow Him cannot do it. But you who follow Him have His Holy Spirit within you. By His grace and power you will live less like little terrors and more like holy, forgiven, children of God. Amen.