

John 6:35-51

Waiting for hours in the Fort Lauderdale airport last week because of a flight delay, my wife and I had the opportunity to observe the people around us. Most were relaxing, reading, eating, or sleeping. But the children, especially the little ones, were restless. It was good, we thought, that they were burning up so much energy by running around the waiting area at the gate because then, we figured, they may fall asleep on the plane and not cry and scream all the way to St. Louis.

One little boy in particular caught our eye. He was running...away from his father. Whichever way the father would go, the child would go in the opposite direction. Although the father wanted him to come to him, the little boy was playing a game. He was not about to be caught. It was not really a serious matter at the time because our flight was nowhere close to leaving. But it would have become a very serious matter had the gate doors been close to shutting and the airplane on the verge of departing.

People today, not just little boys, but people of all ages are playing this game with God. Jesus says in our text, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out." But rather than come to their loving Father and merciful Savior, people are running in the opposite direction. If that father in the airport had simply sat down and ignored his little boy, the child would have stopped running. And surely if God did not desire us to come to Him, we would stop running away from Him. We run because He desires us. We sin because He commands us not to. We ignore His words because He gives them to us. Do we think it's all just a game? Perhaps so...and we've changed the rules. What God calls adultery, we call having an affair. The sin of homosexuality we call being gay. Abortion has stopped being murder; it has become being pro-choice. Like the little boy in the airport, we want to play our game with God, have our fun in life, live as we please and, in the end before the plane leaves, join Him in line and depart into the friendly skies of heaven.

We may not be as callous as some, openly practicing abortion, homosexuality, and adultery, but we enjoy playing the game nonetheless, running this way and that way through life, and not concerned too much that our way is usually not God's way, that our path through life is often the opposite of the path He would have us take. Throughout Scripture He urges us to be people of His Word. But it seems like the more He urges us, the more we keep our Bibles closed and ignore those sent to teach the Word to us. God commands us to forgive each other, to be kind and tenderhearted, but we often run in the opposite direction by holding on to our grudges and speaking in unkind ways to our neighbor. God urges us to receive His Sacrament with joy, but when the church bells are ringing, how many are running in the opposite direction? And of those who are here, how many are thinking of the places where they would rather be? But it's just a game we think. We'll run around in life doing what pleases us and in the end, before our flight leaves, come back to God.

The airport for that young boy was a pretty safe environment. There were no stairs to fall down; no sharp knives lying around; and security was tight. Had a stranger grabbed him, he would not have gotten far. It's not that way for us in life. In running away from where God wants us to be and from what He wants us to do, we are always in danger. I overheard a teenage boy trying to convince a friend of his to smoke marijuana outside a St. Louis mall Friday evening. "It's no big deal," he said, "It won't hurt you and getting high is great!" That's how the devil tempts us to run away from our loving God. "It's just a game," he tells us. "It's no big deal. Live how you want. Do what pleases you. Even though you break God's laws, you can always come back to Him before it's too late.

Doesn't Jesus say that He will never cast out anyone who comes to Him? So play your game in life and later, when you feel like it, you can come to Him."

What the devil does not tell us is that living for our sinful flesh puts our eternal soul in jeopardy; that the more we play our game with God, the more opportunity this sinful world has to shipwreck our faith. The little boy in the airport still loved his father even as he was running away from him, but the more we play around with sin and run from God's will, the less we want to come back to Him. Jesus is absolutely correct...anyone can come to Him--thieves, homosexuals, murderers, liars, rapists--but how many really want to? How many truly have the desire to repent of their sinful ways and return to the Lord? The truth is that we do not want to stop playing our game with God. Games are fun, much more fun than sitting in a hard pew listening intently to the Word and striving Monday through Saturday to live the Word which we heard on Sunday.

What is your game? What game are you playing with God right now? Whatever it is that is keeping you away from His Word; keeping you from doing His will, repent. In the airport we knew what time our flight was leaving, but in life none of us knows our final departure. Death can strike young or old at any moment. The gates can shut while we're still having our fun, before we're ready to come back to the Lord. And what's more...Jesus, as clear as can be, says in our text, "No one can come to Me unless My Father draws him...those whom the Father gives to Me will come to Me." None of us want to come to Jesus, nor can we. It is God alone who draws us to Him. He comes to us in His Word and Sacraments and through these means draws us to Himself.

Off the Florida coast last week as I enjoyed the ocean waves rolling in, I saw schools of minnows all around me. But the second I reached out for them, they darted away. Those fish, like the little boy, refused to be caught. And yet, that little boy today is with his father in St. Louis. And all of us have eaten fish that were caught. How? Because the net drew them in, and because the boy's father, in love, drew his wayward child into his arms.

Am not I, today, looking at the fish that were caught? Am not I looking at wayward children drawn in love to the waiting arms of the Savior? Not one of us is here this morning because we wanted to be or chose to be. It is our Heavenly Father who drew us in love to Himself. He, through your Christian parents, brought you to Christ in Holy Baptism. He through Bible Stories and Catechism instruction kept drawing us even while we were running away from Him. He right now, through the hearing of His Word and receiving of the Lord's Supper, draws us poor sinners to Jesus even though we would rather play our games with Him.

You see, while we were off living for our self, Jesus was drawn to a cross and died for you and me. Because we could not come to Him, God chose to come to us, draw our sins into His body, and suffer punishment in hell for every one of them. While we were playing our game with God, He was wincing beneath the blows of the rods and gasping from the pain of the thorns and the nails. And because he did that for you, he forgives you for the games you and I play with Him. He does not draw you to Himself to punish you, but to bless you; to open His hand with good things for you; to give you His promise that on the Last Day He will raise you up.

That father in the airport did not give up on his son, nor did he cast him away because of his disobedience. He loved him. He was patient with him. And in the end the father's love won out. And that, Christian friend, is why you will be in heaven on the Last Day. Because even though we are disobedient; even though we play games with God again and again, He is patient with us. His love never fails. His mercy is greater than our sinfulness. In grace He keeps drawing you to Jesus here to

His altar, here to where His Word is preached and taught, here to where His forgiveness is poured out upon you and for you. Even more than that father wanted his boy with him on the plane to St. Louis, your Father in heaven wants you with Him for all eternity. And so He keeps drawing. We keep running, but He keeps calling. We keep sinning, but He keeps forgiving for Jesus' sake. Amen.