

What is a parent to do when a child is not only sick, but in very real danger of death? What about when medical science has no remedy, or its best attempts fail? The nobleman of Capernaum seems to be an official of Herod Antipas' court, a bureaucrat in the service of a corrupt and wicked man. It's fair to conclude he is not a pious Jew. He is numbered among the ranks of those who are often seen in Jesus' company: tax collectors and harlots. His son is sick, near death, and he has no other options. He makes the 25-mile full day's journey from Capernaum to Cana, seeking Jesus of whom he has heard, and in finding the Lord, he "**implore[s] Him to come down and heal his son.**" He is not asking for proof that Jesus is who He says He is, does not try to lure Jesus into a trap. The nobleman has no other option, Jesus is his last resort.

And Jesus rebukes him. Because he is seeking Jesus not as the Savior, but as the miracle worker, the means to heal his son. The man approaches Jesus not as God, it is his son who is the man's god. To have a god is whatever your heart takes hold of and clings to. God gives us many things in this life out of His fatherly divine goodness and mercy: food and drink, clothing and shoes, home and land, money and possessions, a spouse and children, good government and fair weather, health and well-being. All of these are good gifts of God, received with thanksgiving. But our sinful heart is an idol factory. It quickly fashions any or all of these into the most important thing, the thing we cannot live without. As much as we see the corruption of the idolatry of money - of things - far more prevalent is our idolatry of our loved ones.

The official comes to the right man, but for the wrong reason. Jesus is simply a means to an end, a longer life for his son on this earth: "**Sir, come down before my child dies!**" We can imagine the tearful plea, or perhaps indeed, some of us need not imagine, for we have implored the Lord to spare the life of a loved one. And often intermixed with the cry of faith is the doubt that we could possibly go on without that person. We insist that far better than being safe and secure in the hands of God, safe from the temptations of this world, released from the lusts of their sinful flesh, and delivered from the murderous intent of the devil, far more important to us is them having a longer life here with us. Repent.

Jesus sends the man away saying: "**your son lives.**" It is entirely possible that this statement of present reality speaks also of the future, that Jesus is essentially saying, "Don't worry, your son will live." Many English translations do this, so that Jesus' words convey the sense that the son is alive at that moment, and that status will not change. Jesus could have made this meaning crystal clear. He could have said as He often does elsewhere, "Amen, Amen. Do not be afraid. Your son will live." He didn't.

Contrary to the way we usually think of Jesus, He is rarely nice in the American midwestern sense. He is not concerned with avoiding conflict. He is not at all interested in keeping everyone comfortable or protecting their feelings. Rather, He disrupts and shock sinners out of their lethargy. He wants to upset idolaters who don't know they are idolaters, trusting in things rather than in Him. What He cares about, is interested in, and seeks to fashion in us is faith and the concern for eternity. He wants a clear and convinced grasp of Him alone by faith.

His words, "**Your son lives,**" are deliberately vague. It is not a sign or a wonder. The man sees no miracle in the presence of Jesus in Cana. It is a promise. The miracle is that the man believes. He does not insist on having Jesus do what he thinks needs to be done. Having only a word from Jesus, he considers that enough and returns home. And he does find that indeed, his son lives, and has recovered.

What we are shown in all this is that we need to learn to believe in Jesus; not just stuff about Him, but to believe in Him. The nobleman doesn't get a promise about this life or the guarantee of a miracle. He believes that come what may, Jesus' word is enough, that Jesus is good and so Jesus will take care of it. Whether the son's life in this world is spared or not, he lives, he is alive to God in Christ Jesus. And so in our prayers for our loved ones, even as we do make our requests and petitions for them to recover, we commend the matter to God, not in fatalism or blind resignation, but in the confidence that He will see to what is best not simply for this life, but unto eternal good.

Perhaps this all seems harsh to us. It is not so different from Jesus' interaction with the Canaanite woman. It is difficult to take, because it is a battle. It is first a battle for your soul, for the affections, trust, and faith of your heart. Jesus alone fights this battle. It is fought against us as He aims to kill that part of us which would find satisfaction in creation, would cling desperately to what is made, rather than its Maker. But as with the nobleman of Capernaum, that battle has been won. Christ's Word has worked faith in your heart. You have been washed and claimed, joined to Christ and to one another. You are sent on your way in this life with His Word that you receive and believe.

But this is not the end of the battle, it is only the beginning. The call to faith that is heeded, is also the call to take up arms, to be a soldier, a Christian knight, a lord in the service of your King, one who has been born anew in baptism, given true faith, certain hope, genuine love for God and neighbor through Christ, holding to the pure doctrine of God's Word, and prepared to fight and contend against devil, world, and flesh. The battle in the nobleman continues on, and so also for you.

As the Christian knight depicted in the bulletin artwork today, we journey on the long road to our heavenly castle, high and distant in the background. The way is beset by the monstrous devil, hounding us from behind. The old Adam, the sinful nature that lies within rides alongside in our breast, continually beckoning us to return to our old way of life, to satisfy our own desires, doubting God's goodness and promise to care for us. And ahead of us, hidden along the way, to make us stumble unawares is the little skull of death. This journey takes place along a rocky, thorn-encrusted path. The world in which we travel is full of harsh dangers. A perilous journey indeed!

But remember whose side you are on. You have been won to the Lord's army; you are on His side. And He gives you what you need as you combat devil, world, and your own sinful flesh, which do not want you to trust in Christ, do not want you to hear and believe the truth and purity of His Word, do not want you to live by the grace of the Holy Spirit, believing His Holy Word and leading a godly life. **"Be strong in the Lord...in the strength of His might,"** St. Paul says. For the war wages on, unceasingly until the day you die. You have the enemies of devil and world outside and inside yourself is the fifth column of your sinful flesh. Your only help, your only confidence, is Christ Jesus and what He gives.

He provides His knights with the armor and weaponry they need. He provides you with the belt of truth, that is, with holy living, humility. You are not General Patton, charging with boasts and ivory handled pistols. You are sober, watchful. You know the seriousness of the battle, the high stakes. Keep back from presumptuous sins, do not put the Lord your God to the test.

You have the breastplate of righteousness, that is, a good conscience. For God has already spoken the necessary verdict. You have the one little word from Him that you need: "You live." And so your inner being is guarded, as with a breastplate. The accusations of Satan, the hatred and insults of the world, cannot pierce you.

You are given the shoes of readiness through "the gospel of peace." Knowing you stand reconciled with God by the sacrifice of Christ for your sins, you are ready to go wherever God sends you, in your church, in your home, out in the world, ready and prepared to face whatever dissatisfaction, discontent, strife and contention crops up. It need not destroy you. This world will rage and roar all it will, it cannot undo the Word God has spoken of you.

And when the missiles and projectiles of the enemy are heavy and thick, you take refuge behind the shield of faith, the apostolic doctrine, the confession of the holy Christian church, what is proclaimed to you in Scripture, the Catechism, in our liturgy, and hymns, the safe pasture of our Lord's life, death, and resurrection for you. Though you be weak and sinful, the man who has died for you is holy and pure. Cling to Him! Rely on Him as on a shield that can cover and protect you, indeed, that can withstand the powers and portals of hell!

To guard your thoughts, to preserve you from fear that it is all in vain, to set your mind on the things of God, what is sure and certain, is the helmet of salvation, the hope and expectation of the final and full revelation of Christ's victory over the world, the devil, and everything, the promise of the next life to expect, the new heavens and new earth, the deliverance from all misfortune, and the putting of all that oppresses and scares us under His feet.

Finally, we are given a weapon. For all these others serve to defend, to deflect the arrows of Satan, to spurn the enticements of the world, to keep out and back the wicked and blasphemous thoughts of our own flesh. But when the time comes to strike at blatant lies about God, His Word and His will, when there are those who would deceive or mislead, the weapon given you by God is His Word, the very Word that first called you to faith.

You are the Christian knight, clothed by Christ's own word and promise. You are protected and covered by His Gospel, and for the long way that will eventually lead through death, you are given the food of immortality, strengthening you in body and soul for the journey, and the gift, guarantee, and pledge of the resurrection of your body. You live.