

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

*“Familiarity breeds contempt”*—you’ve surely heard the saying. Did you know it’s the moral of Aesop’s *“The Fox and the Lion”*? That story goes like this: *“When first the Fox saw the Lion he was terribly frightened, and ran away and hid himself in the wood. Next time however he came near the King of Beasts he stopped at a safe distance and watched him pass by. The third time they came near one another the Fox went straight up to the Lion and passed the time of day with him, asking him how his family were, and when he should have the pleasure of seeing him again; then turning his tail, he parted from the Lion without much ceremony.”* From fear to respect to disrespect or even contempt as the fox became more familiar with the mighty lion.

*“Familiarity breeds contempt”* When applied to us, the saying means, essentially, *“that people who know you well are not so inclined to recognize the exceptional in you.”* That’s what we have in our Gospel lesson today. The people that grew up around Jesus, who knew His guardian Joseph and His mother Mary, His brothers and sisters, the people who perhaps knew the twelve-year-old child who worried His parents and caused them to trek all the way back up to Jerusalem in a frantic search for Him, they’re the ones we see in the Gospel today, who were familiar with Jesus, who treated Him with contempt as He taught in the synagogue and did His mighty works. *“Just who does He think He is?”* they must have scowled.

Of course, they knew. Jesus told them as much, and His mighty works bore witness to the truth of His message. But those in His hometown, and even His own kin, rejected Him. He was a prophet without honor in His own country, but more than a prophet, Jesus was the very Messiah foretold by the prophets of old. And that’s why the people were offended by Him — scandalized to the point of unbelief. To them He was just ol’ Jesus, hometown boy; Jesus the carpenter; Jesus, Mary’s Son; Jesus, brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon and His sisters. Familiarity breeds contempt. According to Luke, they even tried to take Him out and throw Him off a cliff.

Of course, we would never do such a thing, would we? Or wouldn’t we? Well, if you think contempt is too strong a word, consider Aldous Huxley’s modification, *“Familiarity breeds indifference.”* Might you agree to that with respect to Jesus? Have you considered that we have become too familiar with Jesus, that we’ve lost sight essentially of who He is, and so treat Him with indifference? Are you listening with half an ear to this sermon while playing a game or looking something up on your smartphone? Do you tune Pastor out and start to think of the roast in the oven when He starts to proclaim the familiar Jesus as God’s son come in our flesh, the familiar Jesus as Divine bearer of our sins, the familiar Jesus the

crucified whose spotless sacrifice takes away the sins of the world, the familiar Jesus risen from the dead as the source of our life?

Have we become so familiar with the natural course of things, that we become indifferent to the fact that all things came into being out of nothing through Jesus, that without Him was not anything made that has been made — and that He still takes care of the world and everything in it—especially, you and me? Do we consider Jesus so familiar that we find boring the message that it took God becoming what He was not to effect our salvation, the creator becoming creature; the eternal entering into time; the sinless becoming sin; the judge becoming the judged; God becoming both priest and lamb; the deathless suffering death? Have we become so familiar with Jesus that we become uninterested in His atonement for our sin—punishment, sacrifice, a bloody death—and that it's for us? Have we become so familiar with Jesus and this message that we find it blasé, and so we yearn for something better, something more attractive, a better symbol that will draw people: not Jesus hanging from a cross, but Buddy Jesus like the 1999 movie *Dogma* offered us to shore up the church's fading image? Buddy Jesus, a Jesus that points at you and doesn't say, "*by my wounds you are healed*," but instead winks at your sin, and gives you the thumb's up, and says, "*I really didn't mean it when I called it sin.*"

It makes me want to scream. But I won't. I know the Jesus of the Bible is offensive. The cross is scandalous. Holding to familiar Biblical truths is old-fashioned. Using the word sin turns people off. Calling people to repent and believe the Gospel is just so passé and, well, closed-minded. Preaching forgiveness of sins in Jesus name isn't what people's itching ears want to hear today. "*We've heard it all before!*" "*Familiarity breeds indifference*"—I think that's sinful contempt. Repent!

And hear it again: Jesus came for you! Christ Jesus died for you — to forgive you of your sins. Jesus rose again for you, to open heaven to you. Never tire of this message. May, in fact, it become so much a part of you —may you be so familiar with it— that you would sooner lose an eye or a foot than let it part from you.

And not just these words, for the Gospel is a message of love deep and broad and high, and it's manifested in multiple ways—by water, for example, as we witnessed today. But water, being so common, so ordinary, so familiar, when we see it poured over another little head, can seem so "*ho hum*." Luther helps us with the answer, for people then and people today still ask: "*How can water do such great things?*" Many contemptuously answer, "*It can't do anything. It's just plain water.*" And so it seems — the water simply comes from the tap. We have it easy — go to the faucet and turn it on. Out comes water, fit for drinking, cooking, washing, etc. Water? It's no big deal. But it is. The water poured over you when you were baptized and the water poured over little Samuel's head today is a big

deal. It is not ordinary water. It is water filled with God's mercy, for it is connected up with God's command and promise — with His word — and by it He gives what we cannot produce of ourselves: rebirth into the kingdom, rebirth by the Spirit, new life, faith.

Similarly, the Lord's Supper. This gift of Christ to His church has often been treated with indifference —and that under the guise of keeping it special. I've heard it; have you? "*O we shouldn't have the Lord's Supper too frequently! Then it will no longer be special.*"? Have you said it? Repent! And husbands, don't use such flawed reasoning on your wives: "*Honey, I've decided I'm going to tell you, 'I love you,' only once a month, or once every two weeks. Then it will be so special to you.*" In fact, it would be just the opposite. Indeed, as husbands and wives express your love for each other every day, more than once a day, so Christ expresses His love in the church by offering up His own body broken on the cross, His own blood poured out there, every Lord's Day, and we revel in how special He makes us every time we eat and drink our forgiveness.

Familiarity with Jesus, the message of the cross and forgiveness, the sacraments, our liturgy and hymns, perhaps too—they cause people to view the church with indifference or even contempt. I hope you see. That's not a problem with these gifts of God, but of impudent, stubborn transgressors, rebellious people who tire of sound teaching. Repent!

It causes others to say, "*the church needs fixing; she's becoming weak*" and to seek the fix elsewhere, too—in myths or in getting teachers to suit their passions. But this is exactly the time to listen to Jesus' words to St. Paul: "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*" It's time to remind ourselves that the church does best, grows most, when she is suffering—hard to be indifferent in the midst of suffering! For then she responds like St. Paul with his "*thorn in the flesh*": "*I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*"

What has your familiarity with Jesus induced in you? Indifference, contempt, unbelief? Repent! Turn to Jesus. Know that you are forgiven in Him. Then don't give in to your corrupt minds and sinful flesh, but subdue them. Live in repentance and forgiveness. Be reminded of your baptisms daily. Partake of Christ's body and blood as often as you can. Become ever more familiar with this Gospel in word and sacrament, that it might not breed indifference but a strengthened faith and desire to serve our neighbor, that Jesus might be our prophet, priest and king receiving all honor and glory not just in our hometown, Fort Wayne, but especially in our hearts which He calls home. God grant this for the sake of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.