

“God’s Eye Is on the Sparrows”

Matthew 10:24-39 June 25th, 2017

This morning we sang a favorite hymn of many of us “His Eye Is on the Sparrow.” It’s one we have all sung for years and it has special meaning for us. But do you know the story behind the song? “Civilla Martin wrote: ‘Early in the spring of 1905, my husband and I were sojourning in Elmira, New York. We contracted a deep friendship for a couple by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Doolittle, true saints of God. Mrs. Doolittle had been bedridden for nigh twenty years. Her husband was an incurable cripple who had to propel himself to and from his business in a wheel chair. Despite their afflictions, they lived happy Christian lives, bringing inspiration and comfort to all who knew them. One day while we were visiting with the Doolittles, my husband commented on their bright hopefulness and asked them for the secret of it. Mrs. Doolittle’s reply was simple: “His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.” The beauty of this simple expression of boundless faith gripped the hearts and fired the imagination of Dr. Martin and me. The hymn “His Eye Is on the Sparrow” was the outcome of that experience.’” The next day she mailed the poem to Charles Gabriel, who supplied the music.”

The words and melody of that song are deep into my heart and the hearts of many others:

“His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;

His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

I sing because I’m happy,

I sing because I’m free,

For His eye is on the sparrow,

And I know He watches me.”

The words of this song come from the words of Jesus in this week's Gospel. It was made famous by Ethel Waters, who sang it at Billy Graham crusades and used it as the title for her first autobiography.

Ethel Waters knew fear and pain. Her birth resulted from the rape of her teenage mother. She grew up without a father in severe poverty. In her autobiography, she writes that she never lived in the same place more than fifteen months. "I never was a child. I never was cuddled, or liked, or understood by my family." She married when she was thirteen, left that abusive man, then worked as a maid in Philadelphia for 75 cents a week. Despite all that, Waters testified of God's providential care: "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me."

That's the message of this week's gospel. "Don't be afraid," said Jesus.

"Don't be afraid," he said the second time. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father."

And then a third time: "Even the very hairs of your head are numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

Don't be afraid, for God sees and hears. He knows.

Jesus' teachings about "his eye is on the sparrow" is right in the middle of Jesus' other teachings about discipleship. We Christians often forget that Jesus' teachings about "God's eye is on the sparrow" is in the midst of his teachings about discipleship.

Let's briefly backtrack in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew, the tax collector, not only collected taxes but also collected stories of Jesus. Matthew was an organizer and he organized the teachings, miracles, and parables of Jesus.

In Matthew 5-7, we hear the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

In Matthew 8 and 9, we see the miracles of Jesus.

In Matthew 10, today, we hear of Jesus' guidelines for his God-fearing disciples. These guidelines still apply to our lives today. In Matthew 10 as his disciples go out into the world, they/we are to:

- ~Share the gospel and heal the sick.
- ~Not to take any money or appear that we are rich.
- ~Go into a hostile environment that does not like God or God's ways.
- ~Be wise and innocent.
- ~Be ridiculed and persecuted by religious leaders, governments and family.
- ~Be unafraid of those people who are persecuting, ridiculing and killing us.
- ~**Know that we are more valuable to God than sparrows.**
- ~Be public about loyalty to the Lord God and Jesus Christ.
- ~Expect divisiveness and tension from our families because of our beliefs.
- ~Love God more than our families.
- ~Pick up our own cross and follow Jesus.
- ~Lose our lives and thereby find our lives.

So we see that this famous teaching about Jesus (about knowing and loving us more than sparrows) is found right in the middle of his teachings about discipleship.

As I was thinking about this message and the many fears we have, I came across an article in the Extra Southeast Wyoming flyers. It was titled "Man runs 43 marathons at national parks in year." George and I are big fans of the national park system and this caught my eye. It is about runner Bill Sycalik who decided

at age 45 to leave his job as a management consultant in New York City last summer to get out of the corporate life and get closer to nature. He writes, “I decided to make it big,” said Sycalik. “Let’s run long distance and really get inside the parks. Don’t just see them from the visitor center. You get in there and really experience the parks.”

So that’s exactly what he’s been doing. Most runners don’t run more than a handful of marathons a year. Bill Sycalik has run 43 since last June—all at national parks—and he’s still going. His latest run at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve clocked in at six hours and eight minutes. He now has just 419.2 miles and 16 parks to go until he reaches his goal of running 26.2 miles at all 59 parks. He’s also writing haikus about each place he’s visited in March.

Sycalik would like to work as a product manager for outdoor gear companies when he’s done with all 59 parks. He is also considering becoming a public speaker to give talks based on the marathon project. He would motivate people to realize that their dreams are more possible than they think they are.

“People are so caught up in the idea that they can’t leave their job for less than a week,” said Sycalik. “If you’re always going to be that scared and uptight about everything, then you’re missing out. It doesn’t have to be extreme like running in the national parks, but if you want to take your kids and sail around the world for a year, you can do that.

It’s not what you can do, it’s what you actually do that defines you. So figure it out, it’s possible.”

He is certainly an example of having a dream and not being so afraid of the many pitfalls that may be lurking inside the next park that he didn’t try to accomplish his dream. He wrote “dreams are more possible than [we] think

they are”—and I would add if we are not limited by our fears.

The threat of death may be the most powerful form of fear. Some time ago I received an email from Monty Hopkins that speaks to this fear. I would like to share it with you now. It’s about a favorite evangelist, Billy Graham. It goes like this:

“Billy Graham is now 92 years-old with Parkinson’s disease. In January, leaders in Charlotte, North Carolina invited their favorite son, Billy Graham, to a luncheon in his honor. Bill initially hesitated to accept the invitation because he struggles with Parkinson’s disease. But the Charlotte leaders said, ‘We don’t expect a major address. Just come and let us honor you.’ So he agreed.

After wonderful things were said about him, Dr. Graham stepped to the rostrum, looked at the crowd, and said, ‘I’m reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist who this month has been honored by Time magazine as the Man of the 20th Century.

Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching tickets for every passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his vest pocket. He couldn’t find his ticket, so he reached in his trouser pockets. It wasn’t there. He looked in his briefcase but couldn’t find it. Then he looked in the seat beside him. He still couldn’t find it.

‘The conductor said, ‘Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I’m sure you bought a ticket. Don’t worry about it.’

Einstein nodded appreciatively. The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned around and saw the great physicist down on his hands and knees looking under his seat for his ticket.

‘The conductor rushed back and said, ‘Dr. Einstein, Dr. Einstein,

don't worry, I know who you are; no problem. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one.'

Einstein looked at him and said, 'Young man, I too, know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going.'

Having said that Billy Graham continued, 'See the suit I'm wearing? It's a new suit. My children, and my grandchildren, are telling me I've gotten a little slovenly in my old age. I used to be a bit more fastidious. So I went out and bought a new suit for this luncheon and one more occasion. You know what that occasion is? This is the suit in which I'll be buried. But when you hear I'm dead, I don't want you to immediately remember the suit I'm wearing. I want you to remember this:

"I not only know who I am. I also know where I'm going." May your troubles be less, your blessings more, and may nothing but happiness, come through your door. "Life without God is like an unsharpened pencil—it has no point." And may each of us have lived our lives so that when our ticket is punched we don't have to worry about where we are going."

Jesus said: "Not one sparrow is forgotten by God." (Luke) Whoa! Wow! No, not one. Not one sparrow is forgotten by God. Jesus taught it. Jesus said it. Jesus knew the mind of God like no other human being before or after. "Not one sparrow is forgotten by God." This was his poetic way of saying that not one human being is forgotten by God. Jesus, the Mind of God, said it.

"Why should I feel discouraged, why should shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heaven and home,
When Jesus is my portion? My constant friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;

His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
For his eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me.”

Do you believe Jesus' teaching about the sparrows?

Do you believe that Jesus' eye is on you, as much as his eye is on the sparrow?

What do these teachings mean for our lives today here in the 21st century?

“Not one sparrow is forgotten by God our Father.” Put these words deep into your heart. The Lord God watches us even more than the Lord God watches little brown blobs called sparrows. Not one sparrow is forgotten by God Our Father. Nor is any one of us. Jesus is teaching you and me. Jesus is saying these words to us. Jesus is talking to you. You and your life are more valuable to God our Father than the sparrows.

Can you believe it? Can you trust that it is true?

When this truth penetrates your heart and mind that not one sparrow is forgotten by God, when you believe it, when you know it, you then share those convictions with others. You share with your family and friends and neighbors and work associates and everyone...that not one human life is forgotten by God, that their life is known and remembered by God.

As someone has said, God in heaven carries a wallet in his/her pocket, and in that wallet are pictures of you and me. Like the Lord God has an image of every sparrow in mind, so the Lord God carries a picture of you and me in his/her heart. May we live our lives reflecting His abundant love for us! Amen.