

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, June 25, 2023 including two make-up confirmation. Based on Matthew 10:24-39.

"If God cares for sparrows, God cares for us"

Blessings to Ashton Van Beek and Cashtin Tiedt as they affirm their baptism today. Ashton's confirmation verse is from 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:7 "I have fought the fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Cashtin's confirmation verse is from Matthew 6:34 "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have enough worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

Both are excellent verses. Good choices. Ashton's verse looks at our walk of faith as a lifelong journey like a race. You can't run a marathon without training, right? You have to train one mile at a time. The same goes for our faith. Today is Day 1 of the rest of your life of following Jesus. It is just the beginning. Your confirmation is a yes to your baptism and a yes to wanting to follow Jesus. And in Cashtin's verse, Jesus tells us not to worry about tomorrow. We do worry, don't we? Jesus is telling us not to think too far ahead... to look at your blessings each day. In this text Jesus tells us to look to the birds as our theologians. They teach us how to trust God to provide each day.

Speaking of birds. Sparrows show up in our Gospel for today. It reminds me of the old hymn his eye is on the sparrow.

"I sing because I'm happy, / I sing because I'm free, / His eye is on the sparrow, / And I know he watches me."

This song was written by Civilla Martin, the wife of a Baptist Pastor in 1905 after visiting their friends, the Doolittles. Mrs. Doolittle had been bedridden for over twenty years. Her husband was crippled and in a wheelchair. Despite their afflictions, they lived contented Christian lives, bringing inspiration and comfort to all who knew them. When asked what their secret of their joy was in the midst of pain. Mrs. Doolittle's reply was simple: 'If His eye is on the sparrow, then I know He watches me.'

Jesus talks about sparrows and hair on our heads in our Gospel today to encourage his disciples to stay strong when things get tough in life.

Jesus tells his followers to not be afraid 3 times in this text. You will be persecuted and your lives will be threatened for following me.

But the third “do not be afraid” comes when Jesus talks about sparrows and hair. “<sup>29</sup>Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup>And even the hairs of your head are all counted. <sup>31</sup>So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Why sparrows? Sparrows are some of the most plentiful, common birds in the world. Where you find people, you’ll find sparrows. They only live in populated areas because they are scavengers. They aren’t known for their beautiful colors or for their sweet songs. Jesus said two sparrows sell for a penny. A penny is our smallest coin. They were cheap and common. Jesus was making a point that God cares for the most common, unnoticed birds.

Also, did you also notice how Jesus didn’t say that God prevents sparrows from falling to the earth... from dying. God simply knows and cares when things die. I think of Jesus weeping at Lazarus’ tomb. We too will die, and we fail and fall daily. But God knows when we fall, and still forgives us and loves us.

When a sparrow falls to the earth in death, hardly anyone even notices or cares. But Jesus said not a single sparrow falls to the ground apart from your father... not a single sparrow is forgotten by God. If God cares so much about sparrows, how much more does God care for us?

There it is. The Good News! God loves and cares deeply for us common, ordinary humans in life and death. God cares when we fall, when we are discouraged, anxious, fearful, or scared.

That being said, Jesus concludes by saying that following me will change one’s attachments at the most basic and profound level, even within our own families... son will be against father, daughter against mother.

Being a disciple of Jesus should inform our ethics at home and at work... how we talk... how we treat others... how honest we are. Our definitions of loving the neighbor may differ from family members.

Jesus doesn't want to break up families here. However, following Jesus may cause you to question friendships or quit jobs.

This text is convicting to those who want a comfortable faith where we don't take any risks for the gospel. I am convicted by this text. Do I speak up for those who need justice? Do I speak when I should be quiet?

But an active faith in Jesus will be cruciform. Jesus says, whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. In other words, our faith will involve suffering and division at times because of the stands we make. Relationships may be strained. But Jesus concludes “<sup>39</sup>Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

So do not be afraid to lose your life for Jesus. In the process, you will find life that really is life. And trust that if God's eye is on the sparrow, God is always watching us too. Amen.