

Stained Glass Stories – Sparrows
Matthew 10:26-31
Tenth Sunday After Pentecost
August 18, 2019
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Matthew 10:26-31 (NLT)

²⁶ “But don’t be afraid of those who threaten you. For the time is coming when everything that is covered will be revealed, and all that is secret will be made known to all. ²⁷ What I tell you now in the darkness, shout abroad when daybreak comes. What I whisper in your ear, shout from the housetops for all to hear!

²⁸ “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.^[a] ²⁹ What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin^[b]? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. ³⁰ And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.

Pastor Gene and I have begun to notice that “things are changing.” Autumn IS getting closer. We’re walking with sweatshirts and the grasses seem “different.” We know that by the end of the month, the hummingbirds will be leaving.

That’s the bad news.

The good news is that when they leave, it won’t be long before the bears go to hibernate and we can put the other bird feeders back out. ‘Cause we miss the colorful grosbeaks, and finches and yes, even the sparrows.

Scripture mentions birds often.

Our ancient patriarch, Job, realized that the birds have much to tell us about God and is recorded as saying: *“Ask...the birds of the air and they will tell you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?”* (Job 12:7, 9)

A bird’s characteristics make them great subjects for lessons.

Scripture mentions

- storks that know about seasons and migration patterns.
- A psalm writer notes that swallows nested in the eaves of the Temple and that they were wise for living there.
- Eagles soar in Isaiah.
- Hen’s protect their young in Matthew.
- The dove is mentioned throughout the Bible.
- And don’t forget the rooster! 14 times!

In today's reading, when Jesus mentions birds, he's not talking about anything flashy with their color OR their song.

He's talking about Sparrows.

Small, plump, brown-grey with short stumpy tails. An average bird. Truth be told, a little "frumpy" as birds go.

But, do any of you have days when you feel like a "flashy" bird?

You know, when you feel like you've given God your best and showed some of Jesus' traits?.

Flashy bird – when we do something to advance God's kingdom.

I wish those days happened more often!

More often than not, (maybe you feel it too) I'm more like the sparrow.

Pretty ordinary.

I falter and I fail.

And here's what I hope we can all remember: God sees us fall on our faces, get discouraged and when we sin, God knows.

And even then, God loves us!

As I continue this Stained Glass Stories series, I've stepped outside the sanctuary to the Pastor's study door, which is why the bulletin front has that window on it for you. But, don't forget to pause when you leave and take a look. The "sparrow window" was dedicated to Max and Thelma Bush, Dick's parents. While the window is NOT big and bold like our sanctuary windows – and perhaps that's why it is located where it is – it's message is as subtle as a sparrow.

With the dowdy little sparrow, Jesus assures us in just a few verses that there's nothing that we can do apart from the watchful eye of an all-knowing God.

If God sees the sparrow, then we can be assured God sees us.

Isn't THAT something!?

That God put in The Lamp, the Word of God – the sparrow, the most common of birds, of little value, Jesus says “a couple [can be bought] for a copper coin” – and yet they matter.

With that awareness, that God has such concern for our lives, for us to live victorious lives, why should we have any doubt or fear?

While Jesus is instructing his disciples about what they’re going to face as they head out to do their ministries, Jesus uses the phrase “don’t be afraid.”

He begins and ends with the same guidance, and he repeats it in the middle:

“Don’t be afraid” (26).

“Don’t be afraid” (28).

“Don’t be afraid” (31).

We need to remember these three pieces of advice.

I’m going to try and put them to use with additional Scripture passages.

First, **don’t be afraid** because the truth will prevail.

God’s truth wins out in the end.

Second, **don’t be afraid** because God is greater than anything humanity can do to us.

The worst they can do is kill us but, why fear that – that power ends at the grave? Instead, Jesus says, fear the Lord, who made body and soul.

And, third, **don’ be afraid** because God takes care of us.

We’re worth more than many sparrows to the Lord.

So why be afraid of anything?

This week, during my study time, I had two occasions in God’s Word, (one in the OT and one in the NT) where the care of God was distinctly apparent AND we can use them for ourselves.

Praise God when that happens!

Let's look at Joseph in Genesis.

God's care is minute, to the littlest and last details.

I'm ready to do a study on the life of Joseph! 'Cause I've got a list of questions!

In order for the Joseph's life to be used by God for God's purpose we can ask:

- Why did Jacob send Joseph out to the brothers that day?
- Why did that caravan come along (on the way to Egypt) and why were they ready buy a slave the brothers just happened to have in a hole?
- Why did Potiphar's wife have designs on Joseph?
- Why were the baker and cupbearer in the prison at the same time as Joseph?
- Why couldn't Pharaoh remember his dream?

There's more and all of the questions seem unconnected BUT: THE SITUATIONS HAD TO HAPPEN in a particular way at a particular time for Joseph to be in the right place at the right time to save his family when the famine hit in Canaan.

The theologian Charles Spurgeon wrote: "God is to be seen in little things."

Now, we know that Joseph had lots of things to fear all that time as a slave in Egypt.

It's not until (nearly) the end of Genesis that he is able to tell his dysfunctional brothers, "*Don't be afraid*" (hmm, where have we heard those words?) "*Don't be afraid! Even though **you** intended to do harm to me, **God** intended it for good.*"

I think we can use those words as a pointer to the future – not just of God bringing the people out of Egypt, but pointing us to Jesus Christ who has redeemed us from the weight of discouragement and sin; and into the freedom of our lives that stretch into Eternity.

Every detail.

Every hair on Joseph's head...God knew and used those details and that man to move the Kingdom. Not just the nation of Israel; God's entire Kingdom!

Now, transition with me to John, chapter 4 and the story of Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman.

I guess we could make a list here, too. Not of questions but facts, **from God's Word** about the Samaritan woman.

And if God knew **her**, God knows us. That:

- She'd made wrong choices.
- She'd repeatedly failed.
- She was trapped! Where could she go? How could she make the changes she needed to...that she wanted?
- She is isolated. Yeah, the men in town might have admired her but the women were probably sniping and biting at her...otherwise, why would she be at the well in the middle of the day, by herself.

Ever felt any of those things?

Poor choices.

Failure.

Trapped and alone.

Let me slip back to our Matthew reading.

Did you notice that Jesus didn't say anything about God knowing when the sparrow flew?

No. Jesus said God notices when a sparrow falls.

Yes, the "sparrow" has free will to fall, but God DOES KNOW about each sparrow and God cares.

We are the falling sparrow.

We are the failing Samaritan woman with disappointment; thinking that God SEES but doesn't care.

WRONG!

God knows when we fall.

And God still loves us!

THAT, Dear Ones, is the Amazing Grace I sang about earlier!

Jesus said, "...not one of [the sparrows] will fall to the ground apart from your Father."

True enough, God sees when the sparrow falls.

Not just “oops, mark that down, one fell out of the tree,” no.
God is noticing every.single.detail. Even of something as lowly as a grey-brown handful of feathers.

“Don’t be afraid! You are worth more than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:31).
That’s the heart of the matter.

Tiny sparrows, worth so little, and yet God cares for each of them.

But we, Dear Ones, are worth more than a bushel of sparrows.

How do I know this?

Because I believe and want to be sure YOU do too, that Jesus didn’t die for the sparrows.

He died for you and me.

His blood is the proof of how much God cares.

Jesus didn't die for the sparrows.

Who can you tell that to?

We can be so thankful for this wonderful truth.

God watches the sparrow **AND** GOD DOESN'T IGNORE OR FORGET US.

Yes, Joseph had a pretty big role in God’s plan...but he had to go through years of less than stellar life – all the while being put in the right place at the right time, being watched by God and put to God’s purpose.

We’re not much different. We have big roles in our families, jobs and school...and sometimes we have some “hot messes” to get through to FINALLY see how and where God is using us.

Sometimes we’re sitting at a well in the hot, noon sun thinking about our lives that are filled with lonely discouragement and not much hope; without any GOOD goals in sight. Talk about a “hot mess!”

But God!

Our God is NOT a sinister tyrant watching and waiting for us to make a mistake; to fall so that punishment can be meted out. NO!

Have you ever tried to count the number of hairs on your head?

Scientists say that on average we have 100,000 strands of hair.
Fascinating trivia, yes, but not something I think about a lot. I never pick out a strand of hair and say to myself, "I wonder how Number 437 is doing?"
I don't number the hairs on my head, but God does.
He numbers them all; for ALL OF US!

Our God is a loving God who wants the very best for every hair on our heads!
If God knows each strand of hair individually, WE CAN KNOW THAT God knows each of us individually, too!
And God's knowledge isn't general; it is amazingly specific.
God knows us far better than we know ourselves.

And God **still loves and cares for us.**

That's why Jesus came; to bring us into THE VERY BEST as loved and forgiven heirs of the Kingdom!

We don't have to be afraid, because God promised that God will never leave us or forsake us.

[sing:] God's "eye is on the sparrow. And I know He watches [you and] me."

Amen!