



SEEDS AND SPARROWS
PSALM 84:1-4
MATTHEW 10:27-31

I think it is safe to say that most of us here today -- are deeply moved and even inspired when we read of God's mighty miracles recorded in the Word of God.

Just like the world culture in which the disciples were born and nurtured, they also succumbed to the temptation to worship the large -- and despise the small and powerless. We have a tendency to cherish the marvelous and spectacular -- but we put down and neglect -- that which is ordinary and commonplace. We are always looking for something to spice up our daily routine. Young people and young adults often say, "I'm bored."

We don't feel that ordinary routines are of much value when compared to the MTV and YouTube types. Remember how Jesus was tempted to jump off the Temple -- and make a big show? We love the dazzling and the spectacular.

I believe that same thought pattern can be applied to our Scripture lesson today -- where Jesus talks to us about sparrows. We ask, "What in the world -- does this bird talk -- have to do with faithful Christian discipleship in these difficult days?" After all, we are the people of the space-age -- so what does the language of the silly sparrow mean to us?

I believe one of the great paradoxes is that life is full of dramatic moments but yet it is also comprised of many ordinary, commonplace experiences. I think Jesus would want us in the midst of our everyday existence to be open to the sense of the miraculous. However He would never put down the ordinary. There is also great value in using the gift of silence to further and deepen our relationship with God.

The tenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel -- opens up with Jesus sending the disciples into all the land.

They are to proclaim the Gospel to everyone, preaching from the housetops what God has shared with them in secret. The Master even warns them that they will face extreme difficulty -- and undergo suffering because of their witness.

However, the Lord promises that He will be with them as they knock on doors. God further promises that He will reveal Himself to them wherever they go and in whatever they do -- regardless of how insignificant or ordinary the task might be.

Now, I am sure that some of them were disappointed just as we would have been and are today. After all, we believe that God only works in the spectacular dimension. We think that God is like Wal-Mart and Microsoft. We only think big. When God reveals Himself, it is always in extraordinary ways. There is some evidence in the Bible that God has worked in such ways.

After all, we do have the following illustrations:

THE EXODUS OF THE HEBREWS FROM EGYPT
THE MIRACULOUS PARTING OF THE RED SEA
JOSHUA'S BRINGING DOWN THE WALLS OF JERICHO
JESUS' WALKING ON THE WATER AND QUIETING THE STORM
THE RAISING OF LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD
THE CONVERSATION OF SAUL ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

This is God's real work. This fits our image of God well.

I agree that these actions are dynamic, dramatic and decisive and I agree that these are some of the ways that God has acted in human history.

However, the following incidents are also found in the pages of sacred Scripture.

A burning bush in a dry desert.
Three strangers visiting Abraham and Sarah.
You see God is most frequently revealed through the ordinary.
Jesus saved a woman by sharing water at a well.
Jesus saved a CPA by calling up to a man in a tree.
Jesus renews the faith of two disciples by breaking bread.

The late professor Carl Michaelson of Drew University was correct when he once wrote: **“Who would have thought to look for God sucking on the breast of Mary, God in a carpenter shop, God at the back of a fisherman's boat. God on a cross! Who would have thought to look for Him there?”**

Jesus knew the disciples would be intimidated by the mighty power of Rome and the principalities of powers of the world. He knew they had a sparrow complex.

Have you ever looked or considered the way we name our sports teams and mascots? We still worship the big, the beast, the powerful. Have you ever considered why we have:

the Philadelphia Eagles -- not the sparrows?
the Kansas City Royals -- not peasants?
The Minnesota Vikings -- not the peacemakers?

Jesus knew that while the human spirit often cheers for the underdog, we really have the tendency to worship the **TOP DOG**. We really do have a sparrow complex.

The Bible pulsates with the good news of all the sparrows that God did notice:

A hopeless, helpless, hapless paralyzed man who sat for 38 years unrecognized and forgotten at a pool seeking healing?

Who was the person who noticed the man victimized by criminals on a road between Jerusalem and Samaria?

Who noticed the poor widow who gave her small but significant offering at the temple while rich rulers gave theirs?

Who listened to the countless lepers who nobody else would touch?

Who noticed the one lost sheep that was separated from the 99 others?

Who was the one who noticed the children when even the disciples tried to prevent them from coming to see Him?

Now, my whole purpose in mentioning all of these Biblical stories is to bring to our memory that if God noticed and recognized all of these sparrows, then surely He will recognize you.

Wasn't it Jesus who was always talking about farmers, shepherds, housewives, in His parables and stories? Not exactly those listed in the Jerusalem Forbes Top Five Hundred. Wasn't Jesus always talking about small things like pearls, seeds and sparrows?

I further think of a small, frail, Albanian Roman Catholic nun who labors for years in anonymity in Calcutta, India, by caring for God's fallen sparrows in the sick, the dying and the homeless. Yet this sparrow has become the moral conscience of the world.

As I see it, God often uses the sparrows to spoil society's special systems of prestige and power. Isn't it interesting that the sparrows often outlast the more powerful species? I hope by now you know why Jesus was talking about falling sparrows in this passage of sacred Scripture. Here, He was about to send out the disciples into the world to teach and to preach and live out the Gospel -- and they often would feel like sparrows.

This motley crew of 12 Jewish disciples was a rag-time army at best in the eyes of the Roman Empire. With no real influence, worth, power or prestige, Jesus has said they would be the salt, light and leaven of the world. Jesus said they would make a difference -- they would turn the world upside down. I am sure this was just a little overwhelming to those whom Jesus had gathered by His side to be His disciples.

However, a great Biblical truth is so often overlooked when we read these passages about the sparrows -- that although we are sparrows in the eyes of the world -- we are the sons and daughters of God. We are heirs of all the power, purpose and presence that God has promised to all who will believe in Him. God gives us our influence, our worth, our strength, our uniqueness and our character. We need not fear the eagles and the other

seemingly dominating, intimidating powers of the world.

Remember how God used the son of a rural North Carolina farmer -- a sparrow -- to touch the world with the Gospel? You know him as Dr. Billy Graham.

Remember the sermon a few weeks ago by Brother Ray about seeds.

I wonder how many people within the sound of my voice need to be reminded of this today. Hey, you people, wake up! God watches the sparrows outside your windows. Therefore, God is with you and will sustain you everyday of your life. You are never too small for God to notice.

Whether you feel lost in this great Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, overlooked in a large college classroom, or in a large corporate structure, neglected in a large family, frustrated by a monstrous job, or simply forgotten in a cruel world -- the truth of the matter is that you are not. The same God who created you in love will sustain you in that love, no matter how trivial you might feel in this world.

Dr. Fred Craddock reminds us that most of us this week will not write a best seller, end a war, appoint a cabinet, dine with the Queen, or be burned at the stake. However, this week you can write a note, send an email, visit a nursing home, help at VBS, paint a wall, invite someone to an Alpha class and bring them, bake a meal, read a book to a child, share a cup of cold water. Remember, he/she who is faithful in little ways will also be faithful in much. This is what faithful discipleship looks like in the day-to-day stuff of life.

This past week the multimedia of the world constantly kept before us the deaths of two celebrities. A few days ago in this church --we celebrated the life of Laverne Hurst -- and her work and witness. I will take Laverne Hurst over these celebrities and others every day of the week and twice on Sunday. A sparrow in the eyes of the world -- a faithful servant in his eyes and economy.

Eugene Peterson once shared: "I dreamed, Heavenly Father, of doing great acts of service in your name. However, these little opportunities for help and service kept popping up around me. Lord, keep me faithful to the small tasks, discovering your presence in overlooked people and obscure places."

I remind you that Jesus is not saying these words to the crowds, in general, but to those who are **HIS FOLLOWERS WHO HAVE COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO HIS RULE IN THEIR LIVES**. There is another reference to the sparrow that I had read as our Old Testament lesson today and it is found in Psalm 84:

**"How lovely are thy tabernacles, Oh, Lord of Hosts!
My soul longeth yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord:
My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.
Yea, the sparrow hath found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself,
Where she may lay her young, even thy altars, Oh, Lord of Hosts, My**

King, and My God."

Yes, Jesus wanted his disciples **NOT** to suffer from "**I can't - itus**. His sparrow can do great things -- if they simply live in His power and purpose.

The poet, Elizabeth Chaney, expressed this truth when she wrote:

"OVERHEARD IN AN ORCHARD"

**"Said the Robin to a Sparrow,
'I should like to know
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so.'
Said the Sparrow to the Robin,
'I think that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father
Such as that cares for you and me'."**

Yes, in God's house is the peace and security we crave. At the foot of the cross we learn of Jesus who died for our sins, small though we be.

Let all us **sparrows** build our nest in the House of the Lord.

Amen and Amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz
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PASTORAL PRAYER WITH THE LORD'S PRAYER 7-12-09

Gracious and eternal God, it is with joy and thanksgiving that we come into Thy sacred presence this Lord's Day. We praise you – we glorify your name above all names and earthly Rulers. We know that – as we give ourselves to you in worship – you give yourself back to us – to guide our steps – and provide wisdom and discernment.

As we gather this Lord's Day – we place our anxieties and concerns at your feet – and lean back fully into Thy everlasting arms. We thank you that you invite us to share our lives with you. Nothing compares to the promises we have in you.

Lord God – there is great human need crying out for help and mercy – in China, Iran, and many African nations – and may the body of Christ rise to the challenge to see this as an opportunity to witness to your truth and love. We especially pray for missionaries and pastors who labor under tough circumstances in these places. Evil has its moments, but your truth always prevails.

Lord God, we know that the birds don't sing because they know all the answers – but because you have placed a song in their very being to sing. So heavenly Father, you have placed a song in our hearts as well – and help us to sing even when it is midnight – because we know that joy cometh in the morning.

Lord God, we lift to you our VBS program and team – and pray you bless those hands that work faithfully day by day - and inspire more to step forward for this ministry opportunity – and for our Alpha outreach as well.

Lord God, we know there is much human need right here in the state of Pennsylvania with those who have experienced the loss of a job and long layoffs even at Case New Holland in our own backyard. Lord God, we know of the budget dilemma facing so many. Help us to live out the truth that we seek – liberty and justice for all people. Your word teaches us that all people are fearfully and wonderfully made and may that sense of dignity and hope prevail in the days ahead.

Lord, we bring before you many members of our church family who are sick – suffering – facing unemployment and other adversities – and ask you to surround them with your healing power and presence – and provide for each need.

And now with boldness and confidence as your children – we pray as our Savior, Christ, has taught us to pray to say “**Our Father, who . . .**”