

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lena, IL – 25 June 2023
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A – Lectionary 12

1st Reading: *Jeremiah 20:7-13*

Psalm: *69:7-18*

2nd Reading: *Romans 6:1b-11*

Gospel: *Matthew 10:24-39*

Sermon - *Vicar Thomas J. Mosbø*

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

Red Rover, Red Rover, send Peter on over.

Who will love a little Sparrow
Who's travelled far and cries for rest?
"Not I", said the Oak Tree
"I won't share my branches with no Sparrow's nest
And my blanket of leaves won't warm her cold breast"

Who will love a little Sparrow?
And who will speak a kindly word?
"Not I, " said the Swan
"The entire idea is utterly absurd
I'd be laughed at and scorned if the other Swans heard"

And who will take pity in his heart?
And who will feed a starving Sparrow?
"Not I", said the golden Wheat
"I would if I could, but I cannot, I know
I need all my grain to prosper and grow"

Who will love a little Sparrow?
Will no one write her eulogy?
"I will", said the Earth
"For all I've created returns unto me
From dust were ye made and dust ye shall be"

I'm afraid I'm showing my age again. That was a song called "Sparrow" by Simon and Garfunkel, written by Paul Simon, that was on their very first album in 1964. Next to the Beatles, Simon and Garfunkel were probably my favourite group back then, partly because of songs like this one, and its haunting message has remained with me for nearly 60 years now.

The poor little sparrow is unable to find food, shelter, or any care from others, except from the earth that takes it back when it dies, alone, unknown, and silent.

²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

God sees every little sparrow and knows every detail of every sparrow's life. How much more then does God see each one of us. Even the hairs of your head are all counted - of course, that's easier for some of us than for others. But yes, he knows every detail of every moment of your life. Perhaps that is a comfort to some, but a discomfort for others: "Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known." I suspect that all of us have some deep secrets that we would not want to be known. But, of course, God already knows them. We may want to keep them hidden even from ourselves, but if we are honest with ourselves, and honest with God, we know that we have sinned - thought, said, and done what was wrong. "But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Paul writes about that promise in our reading from Romans today: "We know that our old self was crucified with [Christ] so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin." What a wonderful promise. We have forgiveness for our sins through Jesus Christ, and beyond that we have been given the Holy Spirit through our baptism so that we can now live our life to God, leaving sin behind.

Today, as it turns out, is also a minor festival in the Lutheran church - although I left the colour green this week. It was 493 years ago today, on June 25th, 1530, that the Augsburg Confession was presented to the Emperor Charles V to make clear just what the Lutheran churches believed, and the reforms they wanted the whole church to make. The Augsburg Confession was written by Philipp Melanchthon, the trusted friend and fellow-scholar of Martin Luther's, and so on this day we also commemorate Melanchthon as a renewer of the church.

The Augsburg Confession sets out in 28 articles what the Lutheran churches confessed or affirmed to be true. Most of it outlines the basic beliefs common to all Christians - belief in the Trinity, the divinity and humanity of Christ, what the sacraments mean, and so on. And the central theme of the entire Confession is that we are saved, made right with God, by his grace through faith. We are not saved by our own works. As we heard last week from Paul's letter to the Romans: "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." Christ died for us so that we might have life, and have it abundantly. We are saved by his grace, which we receive through the sacraments and through the Word of God. This is the central truth the Lutheran church stands for, and which was expressed in the Augsburg Confession.

And now because we have been saved and have received the Holy Spirit, we are able to do good - not in order to be saved, but as the result of being saved. And yet both Jeremiah and Jesus warn us today that this does not always mean that goodness and happiness are the result. There are those who resent and even hate us and seek to destroy us because we have accepted the grace of God.

There are other secrets that God sees - not just our secret sins, but our secret sorrows as well. Simon and Garfunkel's poor sparrow did nothing wrong, and yet she was shunned and abandoned by those around her.

Jeremiah, too, was maligned for the good he tried to do by speaking God's words to the people. He writes: "I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. The word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long." Even so, he found that he *had* to speak God's word. He could not contain it, even though as he writes: "All my close friends are watching for me to stumble." And God saw his sorrow, just as he watched the poor sparrow shunned by the other birds, and in the end Jeremiah was able to say: "Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers".

Jesus, too, warns his disciples that they will be ridiculed for following him: "One's foes will be members of one's own household". And yet he gives them a word of hope: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

And Jesus proved to us that we are of great value - not because we have earned that value by doing great deeds, but because God valued us enough to die for us: "While we still were sinners Christ died for us".

So do not be afraid to trust in Jesus, no matter how great your secret sorrows. He sees everything and cares for each one of us.

Who will love a little Sparrow? “I will” says our Lord Jesus Christ: “for all I’ve created returns unto me”. And “if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his”.

Amen!

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