

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Perhaps a good place to start our reflection on God's Word today is to ponder the question, "Whom or what do I fear?" We all have fears—fear for a world in turmoil; fear for our nation torn by political dissension; fear for our jobs, our grades, our financial security; fear in our relationships; fear for our health or that of those close to us; fear of rejection by loved ones. Most of us are afraid of dying. And some of us are even afraid of living. We all have fears!

So, when we hear Jesus say today, "Fear no one", and "Do not be afraid," it's a pretty safe bet that He is talking to all of us.

In our text today he is particularly addressing the disciples he is commissioning to carry his message out into the world. He tells them plainly that they will meet resistance, even hostility. He even warns them that their very lives will be endangered, and that some of them will be killed. Still he says, "Fear no one".

He then explains so simply, yet so beautifully, the truth that will overcome every fear. "Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." But then comes the best part, "Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father."

You see, my dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, many of our fears are born out of our very sense of ourselves. We don't think that we count. We don't believe that we matter. We feel so small in the vastness of the turmoil and the evils all around us. We just feel kind of worthless in the swirl of things going on around us. We feel helpless.

If that be so, then conjure up in your mind a little tiny sparrow. Now, here Jesus telling you, "not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge." Note well that Jesus doesn't say that indeed the sparrow can and will at some point fall to the ground. Sparrows do fall from the sky. Larger predators prey upon them. Storms or droughts can deprive them of their food. God's mindfulness does not protect them from life's tragedies.

It is a troubling truth, but still true, sparrows do fall from the sky. So too do we. God's love does not protect us from life's tragedies. This is the most difficult dilemma that Christians face. Why do bad things happen to good people? Why doesn't God protect us if he loves us so much/

I think you who are parents can give some answer to that question. Would you protect your children from all of life's problems if you had the power to do so? Without thinking, many would say, "Yes, of course!" But if you did so, how would they ever grow into responsible, competent, mature adults? Overcoming obstacles produces competence and character. Facing failures and disappointments, encourages strength and determination. Would you really like to build a protective bubble around your children and deprive them of the freedom to grow and

become whoever and whatever they choose to be? No, I don't think so. And neither does God choose to so restrict us.

In his great love, God gives the sparrow the ability to fly high and wide, and continues to love it as it falls from the sky. So too with us, God's love for us is boundless in all the high points and the low points of our lives. As the Psalmist reminds us, "His mercies are never exhausted".

There is a second important truth related to this one. While God's love does not protect us from life's problems, neither are life's problems a punishment from God. Too many of us blame ourselves, and ultimately blame God, when life deals us a difficult blow. God does not cause cancer. God is never driving the car that's in an accident that causes the death of a loved one. The sin of a parent is never the cause of a tragedy where a child dies. No! A thousand times No! Grief is tragic enough without adding to it the crushing burden of guilt.

This is where the Cross of Christ becomes critical. Something happened on that Cross that forever changed the relationship between God and humanity. That is what I was suggesting that the best part of Jesus' commissioning speech to his disciples was. "Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father."

When we acknowledge Jesus before others, we are saying that in His suffering, dying, and rising he has overcome the world and all that is evil in it. Our faith in Jesus the Christ allows for no fear.

This truth is summed up so beautifully in this song;

Why should I feel discouraged, why should the 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.

"Let not your heart be troubled," His tender word I hear,

And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;

Though by the path he leadeth, but one step I may see;

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

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

*Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,
When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies;
I draw the closer to him, from care he sets me free;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.*