

Are You Worth It?

Matthew 10:24-33

Are you worth it? What I'm actually asking is, do you sometimes wonder if you are worth God's attention? I ask that because, when we are going through hard times, whether it's personal in a physical ailment, or a deep emotional loss, or as a people in this moment of violent suppression to the great societal/cultural realignment going on; the long overdue recognition that no one's lives will fully matter until Black Lives Matter, or that LGBTQ rights are simply Human rights; when the hurt, whether personal or societal, is so much to bear, and it just doesn't end, all of us can come to wonder if we are worth God's attention, God's love.

The answer to that question, whether you and I are worth it, is spoken by Jesus to us this morning. In our lesson from the tenth chapter of the Gospel According to Matthew, Jesus tells us that you and I are worth everything to God. Jesus lets us know that, through his talk about, of all things, sparrows.

In Biblical times, sparrows were one of the cheapest items for sale. Anyone could easily afford them as food. Yet, as cheap as they were, a little shopping around could yield an even better bargain.

As we see in our Gospel reading, two sparrows could be had for a penny. But, if we were to read the parallel story to this one in Luke's account, we would find that two pennies could purchase five sparrows. In other words, the sparrow was of so little value, that even the penny-wise merchant would throw in an extra one just to boost volume sales.

Jesus seized on this custom of trade to drive home to his disciples the love of God for God's people. Where people are willing to throw in a 5th sparrow as not worth even counting in a two-penny deal, God still cares and counts. God still marks even the 5th sparrow's fall. Then Jesus adds, "Are you not worth more than many sparrows?"

God loves you and me, Jesus is saying to each one of us this morning, and he cares about even the most intimate and minutest detail of our being and our lives. God says, you are worth it!

Let's consider that thought for a moment, and let's begin by considering how hard it is to believe it sometimes. There are times when life breaks down: personally, in disappointments, setbacks, sorrows of our private lives; and socially in the viciousness and violence of individuals and classes of peoples and societies. When such circumstances go against us, we are apt to turn our resentment, not just upon those responsible, but upon God as well. We're angry that God could allow such things. Or else such circumstances can turn us altogether from God in doubt that God even exists, or if he does exist, that he is concerned at all about our personal cares. We've all heard it, maybe even said it, "In light of this, how can you say that God cares about me?"

At such times we may even begin to see ourselves as just one among so many billions of people in our world, all in need, many worse off than ourselves. It seems inconceivable that God can know and care about any one of us, much less each one of us. So, we distance ourselves from God. There is much that can keep us from believing that God cares.

But, in answer to that state of mind, Jesus comes speaking about sparrows. Quietly he assures us that God is vitally interested in

the personal affairs of our daily lives. God does care about you and me. To our thought that we are just one more unimportant being among all the others, he reminds us that even the 5th sparrow is beloved by God, and it cannot fall to the ground such that God will not take note and respond. To our value that human life is, ultimately, a very cheap commodity in the larger scheme of things, Jesus reminds us that God has never considered even one human life cheap.

If Jesus is wrong, if God does not care intimately for every one of us, then we are what noted biologist and atheist Julian Huxley said we are: “Chattering apes, a boisterous bit of organic scum that for a short time coats [an insignificant planet]; an ingenious piece of portable plumbing.” If Jesus is wrong, if God does not care.

The world would certainly have us believe this latter perspective. It hits us, slaps us down, tries to defeat our ambitions and rob us of hope in the attempt to get us to believe this lesser and easier way. But God will not have the truth of his love denied; not by circumstances or human connivance.

Hagar, from our Old Testament reading this morning, clearly must have wondered about God’s love. After all, who was she anyway? What did she count for? Her former employer, Sarah, was the greatest matriarch in the Bible, but Hagar was just a serving girl. By circumstance and human connivance she is suddenly cast out, a single mother, destitute, abandoned in the wilderness. In complete despair she cries out to God. Perhaps, as in the words of our Psalmist she prays, “Bow down your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and in misery...show me your favor.” Before her prayer is finished, her eyes are shown a bubbling well of water. With that water, her strength is restored, and hope is given to her

for the long march ahead. God's desire, she discovers, is for her freedom from servitude. God has already been at work to set her and her descendants free. And they will rise to become a great nation in their own right. That is God's promise. That will be her future, starting now. And, she discovers all this in prayer.

But here's the thing: that life-restoring well had been there all along. How did she miss it? This is the point: sometimes in the midst of our own despair we become deaf and blind to the very solution, the healing hope we need, that is right near at hand. It is precisely in such moments that we need prayer; a season of deep, groaning, mind-consuming, heart-emptying prayer to center our thoughts and wills in God's thoughts and will. Then our eyes and ears at last clear to recognize the hand of God pointing us to the way of salvation in our circumstance, as God did for Hagar.

I challenge you this morning, whatever you may be struggling with, in any seemingly insurmountable challenge that lies before you, whether it be in your livelihood, the economy, your health, your hopes and dreams, or just life that may cause you to despair, take it to God in prayer. Pour it out until it is all out; until the eyes and ears of your heart and mind clear. For God will show you the waters of the well of life that are there for you, and will give you the guidance to follow, and the action to take, to reach your promise.

Jesus declares that God does care. In joy, in sorrow, in happiness and pain you are in the hollow of God's hand. Even the 5th sparrow, thrown in free for a two-penny deal, is not without the heart of God. It may fall, as sparrows and people do, but it can never fall from God's care. Neither can you. Are you worth such attention? Yes! The lover of the sparrows loves you even more. You are worth it!