

**29** Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. **30** But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. **31** Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

- In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Please be seated. . .

The last time Fr. Richard asked me to preach, it was during the annual stewardship campaign in November of 2019, and my message was about fear and the power it can have over us, a power that promotes a mindset of scarcity rather than a mindset of abundance.

Well here I am again talking about fear this morning. I'm "afraid" people will start thinking that fear is all I think about. To some degree, this is not far from the truth.

After all, we have a lot to be afraid of these days. . .

Just listen to these news briefs from this morning. . .

"The worst violence between Israelis and Palestinians in seven years is spiraling."

"Washington's response to the growing conflict is stoking tensions among Democrats."

"It will take days before gasoline stations in the Southeast return to normal service after ransomware attack."

"Only 0.3% of the vaccine doses administered globally have been given in the 29 poorest countries."

And finally one more that is truly terrifying. . .

"Giant Marilyn Monroe Statue Returns To Palm Springs, But Its Backside Faces Backlash." Don't ask. . .

So it is that I return to what appears to be my favorite topic--fear. But based on what I can see from the gospels, Jesus talks about it quite a bit too. In fact in our gospel reading this morning, he tells his disciples to "fear not" three times.

The context for this is of course what many refer to as the Mission Discourse or the Little Commission, in contrast to the Great Commission at the end of the gospel (Matthew 28:18-20). The Little Commission is directed specifically to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," while the Great Commission is directed to all nations.

Matthew names the twelve apostles, or "twelve disciples," in verses 1 to 4 of chapter 10, and the remainder of the chapter consists almost entirely of sayings attributed to Jesus. In this chapter, Jesus sends out the apostles to heal and preach throughout the region and gives them careful instruction. Many of the sayings found in Matthew 10 are also found in Luke 10 and the Gospel of Thomas, which is not part of the accepted canon of the New Testament.

In the section of this chapter just before the one appointed for today, Jesus is warning the disciples of the dangers they will face as they venture out spreading the gospel. What all of this will “cost them” if you will. To be honest, I am just frightened by the sound of all of this. I would have been the one at the back raising my hand to get some clarification as Jesus says things like. . .

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles. . . Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.”

What comes to my mind immediately is Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book *The Cost of Discipleship* and his description of the differences between cheap grace and costly grace.

“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: “ye were bought at a price,” and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.”

So where does all of this leave us? Well for me, as I looked at the reading for today it brought me straight back to fear--the fear that reveals an absence of faith. A faith that surrenders control to God, a faith that rests on God’s love for us.

But Jesus gets that, because I also heard him telling the disciples, and telling me, telling all of us three times not to be afraid. Fear not! Telling me, telling us not to be afraid. And the verses that help me the most are 29-31: “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father’s will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

You are of more value than many sparrows. God loves us. God loves me. God is present and real and powerful. And I matter to God and you matter to God. God loves and cares for his creation, and you and I are part of that inestimable love. It doesn't mean of course that bad things will not happen to us. But it does mean that those bad things are not the end of the story. The cross is only one part of the story, an essential part of course, but only one part. The empty tomb is the other. . . So there is more, so much more. . . Be not afraid. . .

I often turn to music to calm me and to help me regain balance. This passage drew me of course to Mahalia Jackson's great recording of "His Eye Is On The Sparrow." Do you know it? If not look it up. There are many versions, but to me Mahalia's is the best.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Amen.