

FATHER'S DAY/3rd Sunday after Pentecost

6.21.20 Meditation "God of the Sparrows"

Matthew 10:24-39 (NRSV)

Rev. Darwin G. Edwards

Matt. 10:24 "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

Matt. 10:26 "So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 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. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Matt. 10:32 "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

Matt. 10:34 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶and one's foes will be members of one's own household. ³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY to all those out there who continue to be a father-figure. It is a career that extends beyond the grave. There are so many opportunities for us to be a parent in our world where family units often disintegrate. Nearly all of us have memories of our father-figures. Most are pleasant, but many are not. Those who had a good experiences growing up are blessed. However, those with bad experiences continue to be in pain. While some of our fathers remain among us, many have died and now rest from their labors. On this day we reflect on those experiences.

My dad was a dedicated Christian, family provider, husband, and father. I have many fond memories. He provided all that we needed through his hard work and long hours. I have very

few negative memories and most of them were because of my bad behavior. When he broke out the "Navy belt," I knew what was coming. I treasure the Wednesday afternoons in the summer when he would close his business for half a day and spend time at home working in the garden, taking us fishing and sometimes to the movies. It took years for me to recognize the real sacrifices he made for our mother and each of the four children.

As we celebrate Father's Day, we could easily take verse thirty-five in today's Gospel lesson out of context. We must remember what events come before and after this verse. Jesus is preparing to send his disciples out to begin the mission of spreading the Good News. His instructions and commentary are quite blunt. They will be rejected even by their family. The writers of *The New Interpreter's Study Bible (NSRV)* state in their notes, "Mission divides families, family loyalty is subordinated, and families are redefined not by birth, but by doing God's will." This passage contains a hodge-podge of Jesus' sayings. Christ's message states that each of us is loved and is expected to be about the work of the Kingdom. His instruction encourages us not to fear though we will encounter many challenges.

Jesus is commanding his disciples to exhibit their faith in their daily lives. He also is telling them to be storytellers. Christ wants his followers to share their experiences as they proclaim the gospel. Sharing provides a foundation for others. Many of us think our challenges and problems are unique. However, once we become storytellers, others are able to relate and are encouraged.

As Wanda and I enter our last week at Mount Jackson, we ponder our blessings from the last four years. Jesus sent us here in mission. We left our previous appointment not knowing what the future would bring. We didn't know if our southern mien would be accepted in the northern Shenandoah Valley. In a way we were similar to the disciples that Jesus instructs in today's pericope. We left our family behind as we accepted God's call to move into unfamiliar territory. Some of our family members questioned our motives in leaving our family and venturing into the unknown. Fear and anxiety were a part of the experience. Unexpectedly, God provided blessings for us in the beauty of the valley and each of you.

Rev. Courtney Allen Crump, senior pastor of Grace Baptist Church (of the ABCUSA) in Richmond reminds us that Jesus encourages us to be storytellers of our faith journey. She encourages us to include seven important aspects of our lives in our storytelling. If I were to tell the story of my four-year journey here in this Charge, I would have difficulty crediting the benefactors.

Reverend Crump's first suggestion in telling our mission story is identifying the most important person in our faith journey. I could identify several of you in each church who have aided in making our appointment here a blessing. Each of you have served to grow the ministries of each church. You have been generous and hospitable.

Secondly, in our storytelling we are to proclaim our happiest moments. I have trouble pinpointing one particular moment. Sitting at a table sharing conversation and a meal; journeys we have taken together; baptisms; professions of faith; marriages; and witnessing many of you experiencing "a-ha moments."

Thirdly, the Reverend reminds us to share our saddest moments. We are all human and do not live continuously on the mountain tops. We must traverse the valleys. Funerals, death of

immediate and extended family members have brought grief. Sadness sets in as I watch many of you have to give up your independence for assisted living. But the saddest is watching many of you lose your spouse or loved one day-by-day to Alzheimer's.

Fourthly, in our storytelling we are to speak of the event or accomplishment that makes us the proudest. This would be very hard to narrow down. Among the blessings: watching you work at the food bank; caring for infirm members and friends; doing yard work for those who cannot; repairing a member's porch or kitchen sink; taking persons to doctor appointments; donating to our Health and Welfare Fund; donating and working at S.E.A.R.C.H.; taking food to a neighbor (and pastor); providing scholarships; donating to help members in crisis; and the list goes on.

Fifth, we must share when we feel the most alone. By sharing these times of loneliness, we are able to discern how we might help those in similar situations. Being alone can bring blessings when the world is crushing around us. Solitude is a spiritual discipline in which we begin to know ourselves and God in greater depth. Beware of allowing solitude to evolve into loneliness, which could lead to depression. There are times when all of us feel alone, whether it is in making an important decision or feel estranged from those around us.

Sixth, we should share our deepest regret. One of my regrets is not being given the opportunity to serve this Charge more than four years. I regret not seeing more of the Valley and all of its attractions and beauty. My regrets also include not visiting each of you in your homes, realizing many prefer no unexpected visits. I regret not spending more time in the community. I also feel as if I have failed to be the leader you deserved. Expressing regrets helps me grow in my future ministry while helping others realize their perceived shortcomings.

And seventh, we should include in our storytelling how we would like to be remembered. I would like to think I have made a difference, no matter how minute. Both Wanda and I did not pretend to be anyone other than ourselves. We would hope that you have felt our prayers and especially our love for each of you. I hope that each of you have grown in the knowledge of the Word and felt the very presence of God.

What Jesus is telling his disciples is that each person has a story. Each of our gifts is different and function like the different parts of the human body. Some of us are perceived as possessing greater gifts, but remember that from each of us we are to give as we receive. James 3:1 reminds us: *"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness."*

Verses twenty-nine and thirty are among my favorite: *"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."*

Sparrows are numerous and seem to be everywhere. They are not brightly colored. They do not attract the eye. Often, they become a nuisance. They perch, nest and soil our property. My neighbor has Purple Martin birdhouses erected in attractive wide-open spaces, but sparrows move in before the Martins have a chance. How often have you been to a big warehouse store, seen and heard sparrows among the rafters? Yet, God loves and cares for each one.

Could we be compared to sparrows? In God's created order we are his crowning glory. Though we are created differently and are sometimes messy and aggravating, God continues to love,

protect and sustain us. An old hymn favorite for many of us is *His Eye Is on the Sparrow* written by Civilla D. Martin, music by Charles H. Gabriel (no longer in the UMC Hymnal). I would suggest you refresh your memory by reading the text (it was written before composers became intentionally conscious of not assigning gender to God). The last two lines of the refrain: *For His eye is on the sparrow, And I know He watches me.*

Truly we serve a God of sparrows, a God that cares for each of us, no matter our gender, socio-political status or giftedness. The hairs upon our heads are numbered. Do not fear, live your life and then tell your story. Our faith journey is unique even though we share similar trials and insecurities. Just as Jesus sent his disciples, he sends us. God has uniquely gifted each of us for the work ahead. Do not be afraid. Trust in God who watches over us and is present in all of our lives to the end of the age. Amen? Amen.