

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

We who follow Jesus as his disciples face challenges in this world we live in, challenges such as rejection, suffering, martyrdom in some areas, and slander even in our neck of the woods. The fact is that loving God, loving others, doing for the "least of these" is opposed by the world, opposed by some leaders in government, commerce and even parts of the church. There's an old saying I heard somewhere, couldn't tell you who said it or where I heard it, but it goes something like this, "if you are going to pick up your cross daily and follow Jesus, make sure you look good on wood." As you've heard me quote this from Bonhoeffer before "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." The truth is that all the things we tend to hold dear, the stuff in our wallets and bank accounts, our status in life, even our families, are changed by Jesus, our treasure, our joy, our salvation.

And the author of our faith shares this with us "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows." I mention this because sometimes we take the loss of loved ones or our own health, to mean that God has left us, abandoned us. But no matter the heartache, the pain or sorrow, no matter what it is, we are not alone. Even the sparrow doesn't fall alone without God knowing it.

We may not always be rescued when we feel we should be rescued, but whatever we go through, we are not alone. After all, the hairs on our head are counted, easier for some than others, but in other words God knows you better than you know yourself. If God knows the tiny sparrow, how much more so, you and me.

The Apostle Paul shares with us in our second reading this morning "Do you not know, that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death!" When our hearts are breaking, when we long to die, when we face ridicule and persecution, we are reminded we have been buried with Jesus into death and death brothers and sisters is behind us, Christ did it for us, dying the death we deserve, living that we may never die. The only death that counts for you and me is our baptismal death. So when our eyes close for the final time in this world, it's not the curtain coming down, but the curtain going up. If God cares for the sparrows, then how much more so does he care for us who have been joined to the death of Jesus and who are promised to be united with him in a resurrection like his.

What have we to fear who have death behind us? What do we have to worry about? We know that sparrows don't fall out of the hands of God, and Jesus has promised that nothing can take us out of God's hands. Elsewhere in Romans, Paul tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is Christ Jesus. This is part of the joy we share, like a burning fire shut up in our bones, weary of holding it in, we cannot but share the good news of Jesus and the love of God. AMEN

