

January 5, 2020 No Sparrow Is Forgotten Luke 12:1-12

I always find myself somewhat introspective at this time of the year...the first Sunday of a new year and a new decade in this instance. A sense of excitement, it is like we are starting over. People use the phrase clean slate. But along with the clean start is the uncertainty of what lies ahead. And with the Iran assassination, and the threats issued against America I have a sense of unease that I suspect is not unique to me.

I chose this portion of Scripture for this day weeks ago. I outlined the Advent series back in November. In the week that followed I outlined Christmas Eve and the Sunday that would follow...the last one in December. On December the 3rd, I sent a first draft for this service to Sherry so that she would have lots of time to produce the bulletins before her holiday. I share that with you, so that you might simply know I had no idea where we might be on this particular Sunday or in this particular week.

Luke's is the least accidental of the four Gospels. What I mean by that is this: he was writing Theophilus a letter. The name Theophilus, is a Gentile name. It has no roots in Hebrew. Luke, himself, reveals to us that he is highly educated, aware of a wider world than most, and he writes to tell his friend "the most excellent Theophilus," clearly someone in government, or a person used to wielding power, the whole story as he knows it, about Jesus "who came to seek and to

save the lost.” The portion I read to you is set in the midst of these things. In chapter 11 we find the Lord’s prayer given in answer to a request for teaching on how to pray. We also find this portion linked with Jesus comments that the Pharisees who were critical of him, belong to a line of forefathers who killed the prophets for what they had the audacity to teach. And just over the page in chapter 11 we find Jesus telling his disciples and the gathered crowds, “no one lights a lamp and then puts where it will not shed light in the room.” And Jesus does shed light on life, on God and eternity, and our destiny.

Notice Luke’s description of Jesus audience. “A crowd of many thousands had gathered.” I would remind us all, myself included, Luke is not given to exaggeration. He is careful about sources. He writes with a sense of time and place, diligent in the attempt to set Jesus ministry accurately in the world of the time, and in Judah of that day. His popularity as a teacher who knows the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and who is sensitive to the real nature of God, and who has insight concerning eternal things is apparent. People wanted to hear HIM.

This portion began as a conversation with the disciples, the twelve, but sensitive to the reality of the crowds and why they are here means that that private conversation evolved into a public address heard by thousands of people. Crowds so great, that in their enthusiasm to hear what Jesus had to say they squeezed close to one another to be closer to

Jesus. They were hungry not just to hear some of what Jesus said, they wanted to hear every word, HIS tone of voice. They wanted to drink it in like the water so precious to living in a land that is for the most part desert. They step on one another. It is cheek to jowl, shoulder to shoulder, as tight together as is possible.

What does Jesus say? It starts with a warning about the Pharisees. Jesus refers to their teaching as yeast that is laced with hypocrisy. In other words, they say good things, after all they are Biblical scholars. But the point in calling them hypocrites is that their lives and their teaching do not align. Remember that line in some of the really old western movies, “white man speak with forked tongue.” A shiver runs down my back every time Jesus says this kind of thing about the Pharisees. As a religious leader, trying to be faithful, I sometimes worry about myself and my colleagues and how we will fair in eternity. We need to be careful...to weigh the words against the life being lived. That’s where this teaching starts.

Jesus goes on to say, “there is nothing that is concealed that will not be disclosed.” We all think we have secrets, that we have managed to keep from the light of day. Jesus talks about the God who knows everything, and eternity in which we will face the truth, the whole truth of what we have said measured against what we have done. What you thought you had whispered in the ear of people you could trust, behind locked doors, in complete privacy, will be the

headlines of public knowledge. God sees. God hears. God knows. Everything.

This is about sin, and our attempts to appear clean and righteous. Jesus reminds us that death of the body is not the end of things. That death is not followed by the great silence to which the modern mind has tended to believe, but rather the sounds of disclosure of reality, and the sounds of judgement. Jesus reminds us that we will face God who is a Almighty. And Jesus suggests we need to take that reality seriously.

And yet, even as Jesus talks about judgement HE talks about grace. Grace that forgives. Grace that sustains. Grace which is the greatest kind of love. "Five sparrows are sold for two pennies." I wrote when I was in Israel the first time that I was surprised to see sparrows that looked like the sparrows of home. They are so very common, and common to the whole world. "Yet not one of them is forgotten by God." The worthless, the unworthy, are remembered in those eternal courts. Remembered and valued by the most distinguished judge of all. Jesus is talking about HIMSELF and why HE is with this crowd of thousands of people and these disciples (a hundred and twenty?) or maybe (just twelve...and one of them a betrayer). Even as HE speaks of judgement, HE speaks of mercy that redeems, salvation that cleanses the innermost part of our nature.

No sparrow is forgotten by God, your heavenly Father. Here is an essential truth for those who feel beaten and lost, “the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” God knows you and knows things you do not know about yourself. He values you in ways you have never given yourself credit. I don’t want to sound like I am trying to be funny, but I have so few hairs left on my head. The Lord knows that kind of detail about each one of you. He loves you, and the truth is no matter how much you think HE loves you...He loves you more. But we cannot afford to be careless.

We have just come through the celebration of another Christmas. Think of it: some of these Pharisees may have been part of that conversation in Herod’s court. The question was “where is he that is born to be King of the Jews?” And the answer was, “The prophets say he would be born in Bethlehem, in the fruit growing region. But they were careless. They did not take HIM seriously. Or at least they took more seriously those who could kill the body.

Jesus said something more. “Those who acknowledge me before men, the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God.” I would put money on the hunch that people know you do this church thing, worshipping God, investing money in caring for others. That means people know you have aligned yourself with Jesus. You have an advocate with the Father. Jesus is prepared to represent you as one of HIS own in eternity’s courts.

It is a New Year. Possibilities lie before us. In the balance of 2020 we will all have choices to make. We will have moments when we will be asked to help people who need help. We will pray for anyone who asks for your prayers, for those whose needs we are aware of. With the words of Jesus ringing in our ears I say to you, Go with God and Go in peace. And be assured: No sparrow is forgotten, and don't be afraid. In the eyes of Jesus, you are worth more than many sparrows.

Let us pray;

Lord we live in a violent world. We know that blood has been shed, and we know there have been threats of reprisal. We pray for peace. We pray that those who have been enemies might receive new hearts and new life. We pray that those who are in need might have their needs met. Grant us the blessing of your presence with us as we begin again, a year of work and faithfulness. Lead us in worship and service. In Jesus name. Amen