

**The Third Sunday after Trinity**  
*Wilton Parish Church, 2023*

*Matthew 10: 24-39*

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

In these warm periods of the year I have taken to going out at around about dusk to water the garden. I have it in my head that you're not supposed to water plants when the sun is beating down on them because you can scorch the roots. And the other day I was pottering around watering the garden and I discovered the tiny body of a little sparrow, dead in one of my plant pots, tucked in amidst the geranium leaves. I guess it must have flown into the glass of my study window and been killed instantly, and had fallen down into the pot. That little episode obviously popped into my mind when I was thinking about today's second lesson:

'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.'

Jesus, as depicted in St Matthew's gospel, is clearly a lover of nature, and he draws metaphors and similes from the natural world as he tries to explain to his disciples what the relationship is between us and God. Of course, just a few chapters earlier in Matthew's gospel we get that great and famous Sermon on the Mount, where again Jesus tries to explain the nature of God and his creation by asking us to 'consider the lilies' and to 'consider birds of the air.'

And somewhere, from singing hymns and songs at my Church of England primary school, bubbles up in my mind the song which begins: 'There are hundreds of sparrows, thousands millions, they're two a penny, far too many there must be. There are hundreds and thousands, millions of sparrows, but God knows every one, and God knows me.'

It was a curious and rather comforting thought as we disposed of this little bird's body, that not only did God know the very moment of its fateful flight into my window, but that God knew that bird. God knows every one, and God knows me.

Our readings this morning invite us to reflect on the nature of our relationship with God. And through these unfolding Sundays after Trinity, stretching away into the mid-autumn, 21 Sundays after Trinity this year, it is the work of the church to remember our status, our relationship with God, and to recommit ourselves to honouring that relationship. That relationship with the sort of God who perceives every sparrow-fall, who knows every hair on our heads, who values creation. Who has invested in creation. Who, when he first looked upon the newly formed skies and sea, the land, the creatures, and our first ancestors, saw that it was 'very good'.

Earlier in our gospel reading we heard Jesus say to his disciples, 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master.'

And actually that's a really important little line, in terms of thinking about how we should be being formed as Christian people. What should the Christians of Wilton Parish be endeavouring to do? To be like the teacher. 'It is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher.'

What happens, as a Christian says their prayers, reads their Bible, comes to church, receives the Sacrament, spends time in the presence of God, looks to Christ as their example, is that slowly, slowly we become more like God. The theologians referred to this process as divinization. Becoming more divine. Closer to the shape of the kingdom.

And put really simply, holiness, which we strive for, is being more like God. Holiness is a disciple being *like* the master. And sin, conversely, is a disciple seeking to be *greater* than the master. Remember Jesus said at the beginning of our second reading, ‘a disciple is not greater than the master.’ That’s where we trip up. That’s when the world trips up. When we decide that we know better. That we can surpass our master, that we can make a better decision. That our needs or desires are more important, and override the obligation to be like our God who is known, amongst other things, for being so caring, so attentive, that he notices every sparrow fall.

Yesterday was the feast of the Birth of John the Baptist. John the Baptist of course pointed towards Christ. Literally, in the gospel, where he says to his own followers, ‘behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’. And through his preaching reminded the world of the need for radical change. The need for repentance. Which of course literally means turning around. Reorienting our lives so that they, like John the Baptist, point towards the coming of Christ. Become more like Christ. Become more like those extraordinary paintings by the old Masters of John the Baptist with his extraordinarily elongated forefinger, pointing, always pointing away from ourselves and towards Christ.

And as I said at the beginning, this summer season, every year, these green Sundays after Trinity, are the time when we relearn,

and we refine, our own discipleship, so that we turn away from the behaviours which are indicative of trying to be greater than the master, and we identify again our calling to be like him instead.

And in closing, here is just one aspect of that to try this week. ‘There are hundreds of sparrows, thousands, millions, but God knows every one, and God knows me.’ One of the things that we learn about God from today’s second lesson is that God notices. God is attentive. God honours every sparrow, every hair of your head. And there’s a reminder there for us to do likewise. To notice. To care. Not to rush through life always trying to get to the next thing. To be present to every moment of creation. To be present to every person. Not constantly looking around to see if there is someone more interesting or important, but to commit in love to each moment in life. It’s what the Benedictine tradition refers to as stability. Living in the present, because the present is a gift. Seeing in every sparrow, every hair, every moment, every person, the person and nature of Christ. There’s a line in the Rule of life of my Order, the Order of Anglican Cistercians, says we should treat every single moment ‘with due attention and love’. And it goes on to say that even the seemingly minute, insignificant or boring tasks and moments of life should be lived ‘with respect and dedication’. Doing the washing up. Sweeping the floor. Doing the tax return. Wrapping up the body of a sparrow.

It is enough for the disciple to be like the master. Try it this week. The next time you encounter something that feels boring, or tedious, make it an offering of prayer and dedication. Notice the sparrows.

Amen.