

Sermon for June 25, 2017 - "Secure in God's Care"

Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 25, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click on this link to read the scripture passages for today.](#)

Secure in God's Care

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

What is a life worth?

Lawyer Kenneth Feinberg wrestled with that question when he led the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund. He was responsible for allocating money to the families of each person who died in the attacks.

To determine how much the families received, Feinberg considered the victims' ages, their dependents, their income and earning potential, whether they had life insurance. He ended up with a huge range - the monetary value assigned to some blue-collar workers was two-hundred fifty thousand dollars; the value assigned to some executives was seven million, one-hundred thousand dollars.

Later Feinberg reflected on this experience in a public radio interview. He said, "Our system of justice has always been based upon the idea that compensation for death should be directly related to the financial circumstances of each victim ... Trained in the law, I had always accepted that no two lives were worth the same in financial terms. But now I found the law in conflict with my growing belief in the equality of all life. "

What is a life worth?

Jesus speaks to this question as he sends us out to be his disciples in a dangerous world. He sends us to face hatred, violence, division and "those who kill the body". And even as he asks us to be willing to risk our own lives for the sake of his work, Jesus reminds us that all life has tremendous value.

Of course, to Jesus, the value of a life does not lead to monetary compensation or a guarantee of safety, it means that all life receives God's care and attention. Jesus uses the example of an insignificant sparrow to show this.

Sparrows were very low on the pecking order in the ancient world. They were the food of the poor. They sold two-for-a penny in the market. Yet, Jesus says even the sparrow receives God's attention; even their lives and deaths are not beneath God's care.

This passage inspired schoolteacher Civilia Martin to write the lyrics to the song "His Eye Is on the Sparrow", the gospel hymn that confesses - "I know he watches me." This hymn has struck a chord in the African-American church perhaps because God's attentiveness to the sparrow speaks of God's care for undervalued lives.

In a world that acts like black lives don't matter, God prioritizes those who are overlooked and exploited. In a world that says the life of an executive is 28 times more valuable than that of a blue-collar worker, God pays special attention to those who are poor.

God is concerned with the care and redemption of all life. Jesus calls us, his disciples, to share that concern. We are to pay attention to those who are ignored. We are to value all that God has made. We are to join Jesus' work of reconciling all creation to God.

Taking up these concerns and sharing in Jesus' work puts us at odds with the society around us, sometimes even with people in our own family. Our lives become less comfortable. There is risk and sacrifice.

Yet following Jesus in this way saves *us* from the death-dealing aspects of our culture - from the greed, wealth and pride that destroy us. These behaviors and patterns do not only inflict material harm on those lower down the economic ladder, they inflict spiritual harm on us all. We become isolated, anxious, and self-centered. We strive and grasp and hoard. We seek security at the cost of our others.

When we live this way, we lose out on the life God intended for us. God created us to live together in harmony. Each precious life that God so values is bound together with all other life. When one life is diminished, we are all diminished. Our well-being and our liberation is connected to the well-being and liberation of all creation.

We cannot recognize this when we are so focused on ourselves. It is only when we lose our self-centered lives that we find the life of abundance and community God longs for us to know.

So, Jesus calls us to stop trying to secure our own lives. He calls us to let go of our tight hold on what we see as our own. He calls us into sacrifice, service and prayer that opens us to others and frees us from self-centeredness.

Jesus also reminds us that we have real and abiding security in the God who cares for the sparrow, the God who values all life. God's eye is on the sparrow and on each one of us. We are secure in God's care and attention, now and forever.

With that assurance, we can follow Jesus into work that disrupts and heals the world.

We can challenge legal and political systems that value some lives above others.

We can declare out loud the things we've heard in dark rooms.

We can face those who wish us harm.

We can remain steadfast even if our families turn against us.

We can follow Jesus into death and abundant life.

Let's take a moment for prayer.