

7.14.2019 Trinity 4 (Matthew 10:24-39)

After spending the last few days at the fair, at times feeling a little lost and insignificant in this huge crowd of people, I was so encouraged by these words from our Second Lesson: *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows"* (Matthew 10:29-31).

Not one of us is ever out of God's sight. Nothing ever happens to us of which God is unaware. In fact, not only does He know what's happening to us, and what's going to happen to us, the truly amazing thing is that the Omnipotent Creator of Heaven and Earth cares about every detail of our lives. The incredible, miraculous truth is that we matter to God, more than we can possibly imagine. He is intensely and intimately interested in who we are and in what we're going through, and therefore Jesus tells us, *"Don't be afraid."* Don't worry or be anxious, because God is watching over you, at all times and in every situation.

Consider these words that David wrote in Psalm 139: *"O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord... Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast"* (Psalm 139:1-4, 7-10).

David understood that God doesn't view us simply as a mass of humanity, as some nameless and faceless collection of people covering the earth. He sees us, and cares for us, as individuals, and no matter what we do or where we go, He is there with us. He has known us intimately, each one of us, since before our birth. While we were still being formed within our mother's womb, He was watching over us and caring for us. In fact, Paul tells us that we were in the mind of God even before the world was created. Before any of this existed, God was thinking of you and me. In Ephesians we read, *"Praise*

*be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight"* (Ephesians 1:3-4).

All too often we face a world which seems to say, "You don't matter. You're just another face in the crowd." But I'm here to tell you that's a lie. We all matter to God, so much that He gave the life of his only-begotten Son, in order to save you and I from sin and death and to make us a part of His family. Before this world existed, God was thinking about each one of us, and making a plan. He has plans to bless us, to call us to Himself. Plans to manifest His love to us in every possible way, both now and throughout eternity.

Let me ask you this: Have you ever noticed the importance of individual people in the Bible? Individual men and women, with names, families, histories, personalities, strengths, and weaknesses. When God brought mankind into existence, did He create a whole race of people at one time? No. He breathed the "*breath of life*" (Genesis 2:7) into a single man, with a name – Adam, and created a woman, with a name – Eve. When God decided that He was going to bring a great flood to destroy the earth, who did He preserve? Noah and his family. When God decided to separate a people for Himself, out of all the nations of the earth, what did He do? He called one man, Abraham, and again, when God brought His people out of slavery in Egypt, He called one person to lead them, Moses. Finally, when God the Son, the Eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity entered creation in order to become our Savior and Redeemer, He chose to do so through a woman, the blessed virgin Mary. God sees individuals and He loves individuals.

Consider the way Christ ministered to people. Yes, He taught the multitudes. Yes, He fed the five thousand, but when He healed people, it wasn't in great masses. If He wanted to, He could have waved his arms and cured hundreds in an instant, but instead, He placed His hands on them, one at a time, and healed them, one at a time. In the gospels, we see Christ constantly interacting with individuals, the woman caught in adultery, the rich young ruler, the woman at the well, a demon-possessed man, a paralytic, a blind man, a centurion, a tax collector, and therefore we know that when Jesus saw

the five thousand, He didn't see a crowd. He saw individuals. In the same way, when Christ looks at you and I, that's what He sees, not anonymous faces in the crowd, but His precious children, who He knows intimately and loves beyond measure.

The fact that God knows us and loves us as individuals reveals the truth that His plan for each one of us is unique. All we need to do is look around this room and we'll quickly discover that God does not own a cookie-cutter! He does not use identical methods to stamp out identical little disciples. God loves variety. We should never compare ourselves to others, striving to be like them or some made-up ideal, for that won't glorify God or bring joy and peace into our lives, but what will is just being the best unique child of God that we can be, wherever He has placed us. When we live that way, when we live according to His will, we can rest in the knowledge that where we are now, and who we are now, is the result of God's sovereign love, and that knowledge allows us to be thankful in every circumstance.

God's love for the individual is also an incentive to prayer, because when we pray, we're not simply looking up to the heavens for help, we're not trying to harmonize ourselves with the energy of the universe or presenting our appeals to an indifferent or hostile greater power. Instead, we're approaching our Father, who knows us and loves us, who delights in doing good things for us. When we go to God in prayer, He doesn't say to Himself, "Someone is praying," or even, "one of my children is praying." He says, "Hannah is praying. Bob is praying. Mary Lou is praying. My child, for whom my Son gave His life on the Cross is praying. I'm listening."

The intimate, personal love of our Father provides endless comfort in times of trial, for when we suffer, we know it's not because God has lost us in the crowd, or because He no longer cares for us. On the contrary, it's because of His love that we can rest in the knowledge that something in our lives will be accomplished through the pain. We aren't just victims of blind fate or pawns being tossed around by an uncaring, random universe. St. Paul assures us that "*all things work together for good to them that love God*" (Romans 8:28). As each second passes, God knows all that we are going through, for we are infinitely more precious to Him than any number of sparrows. The Cross is indisputable evidence of our value to Him, and so if we are suffering, we

know that this suffering is producing something good in our lives, something that is abundantly worth the cost.

God knows us and loves us by name, personally and intimately, and that fact should motivate us to seek Him, to the end that we may know and love Him personally and intimately. Our Savior Christ has removed every barrier, He's made it possible for us to truly know God, and isn't that the goal of this whole endeavor? The Christian religion, the life and death of Christ, even the creation of the world, all of this happened so that we may know and love God, and be fully known and fully loved by Him. Such intimacy with Him should be the purpose of our lives right now, just as it will be our purpose and joy in His heavenly kingdom.

This world may leave you feeling like you're just another insignificant face in the crowd, but Jesus says, "*Don't be afraid,*" because even before the world was made God was thinking of you, and making a plan. A plan to love you in every possible way, both now and throughout eternity. To Him alone be the glory both now and forever. Amen.