

“Called to Love as God Loves”
Stouffville United Church
Sunday, March 14th, 2021

Psalm 107, John 3:14-21

In our church’s old blue hymnal, there is a favourite children’s hymn, and some of you will know these words very well:

God sees the little sparrow fall,
it meets His tender view;
if God so loves the little birds,
I know He loves me, too.

I think we’ve always drawn comfort knowing that God the Creator is keeping an eye on everything in God’s creation, including the little sparrow. Our Psalm today also does a good job reminding us of the ways in which God keeps an eye on those who call upon him in their distress. Psalm 107 breaks down into four stanzas that share a similar formula – ‘Some of you were lost in the scorching desert, far from a town. You were hungry and thirsty and about to give up. You were in serious trouble, but you prayed to the Lord, and he rescued you.’ Then, we read, ‘Some of you were prisoners suffering in deepest darkness and bound by chains. You were worn out from working like slaves, and no one came to help. You were in serious trouble, but you prayed to the Lord, and he rescued you.’ ‘Some of you made a living by sailing the mighty sea. You were tossed to the sky and to the ocean depths, until things looked so bad that you lost your courage. You were in serious trouble, but you prayed to the Lord, and he rescued you.’

Do you see the pattern? Some of you were in serious trouble ... you prayed to the Lord ... and he rescued you. You were given your life back, you could go on, you were lifted up from what was threatening you. God delivered you from your oppression, from your fear. You were saved. You were redeemed. There was a contemporary Christian song¹ that I liked way back in 2003 – it had a relentless marching beat that seemed to want to summon you to get up and follow the people as they sang – ‘Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Every knee shall bow. Every tongue confess that Jesus our Lord is marvellous.’

One of the perils of the use of the word ‘some’ in this psalm, is that it serves to differentiate people into two groups – those who are redeemed, and those who are not redeemed. This psalm points out that there are ‘some’ who are redeemed because they were in trouble and they called on God who rescued them. But we are made aware of the ‘some’ who have not called on God, who are not redeemed.

God sees the little sparrow fall. When we were children listening to this hymn, we thought of that little sparrow as us. That God would pick us up if we fell. But what if the sparrow isn’t us. What if the sparrow is someone who society labels as ‘un-redeemable.’ Like someone who lives on the streets. “It is estimated that approximately 35,000 Canadians experience homelessness on any given night, and at least 235,000 Canadians are homeless in any given

¹ Nicole C. Mullen, *Talk About It*

year.”² If God’s eye is on these sparrows, these homeless sparrows, are they not redeemed simply because God has his eye on them? Does the little sparrow have to acknowledge God’s presence *before* God will notice the little sparrow? No. God’s love is there first. There are no conditions to be met before God loves.

You and I don’t always see the little sparrow that God is watching because society has done a good job of ignoring these sparrows, to the point that they’ve become invisible, because we’ve pushed them to the margins. The homeless in the streets and ravines. The aged who are housed in nursing homes with substandard care. The indigenous living on reserves without running water and proper housing.

So, if God’s eye is on all of these, including us, why do we make distinctions? There are no variants in redemption, there are no ‘grades’ or levels of redemption. We all receive the same grace from God no matter what our story. And remember, we are all made from the same dust that Adam was made from. There is no better dust. There is no lesser dust. It is the *same* dust. But we have shoved the homeless, the indigenous to the margins where we don’t have to notice them. But we are called to be more than this. As Toni Morrison writes, “We are the moral inhabitants of the globe.”³

John 3 has the beautiful lines that so many of us recognize – God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that who so believeth in him, will not perish but have everlasting life. God so loved *the* world. Not just *some* of the world. Not just *some* of the people. And God’s love covers every person in God’s creation – from the boys to the girls, from the youth to the seniors, to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer people, with no regard to skin colour, spoken language, or economic status. God’s love covers them all.

The Psalm says, ‘Shout praises to the Lord! He is good to us, and his love never fails. Everyone the Lord has rescued from trouble should praise him, everyone he has brought from the east and the west, the north and the south.’ And the people will gather to give thanks to God for their redemption. They can join together in a “celebration of difference!”⁴ They can celebrate that they come from the north and the south and the east and the west of God’s creation. And they will celebrate and remember that God’s love is not just for ‘some’, but that God’s love is for all people in this world.

God so loved the world. Not just some of it, or a part of it. But the whole world. Jesus died on the cross not just for some of us, but for the whole world, the redeemed *and* the unredeemed. There isn’t one person in the world who hasn’t called out for help at some point in their life – whether they cry out to God, or maybe they’ve never learned about God and they cry out in their loneliness, or maybe they’ve reached out to a friend for help, or called a help line.

² www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/homelessness-in-canada

³ Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (New York: Vintage Books: A Division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2019), 48.

⁴ Willie James Jennings, *ACTS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 217), 90.

We have all called out in need. And in that calling, in our voice asking for help, don't you believe that God hears every call, regardless of whether we are redeemed or not? Redeemed or unredeemed.

It doesn't matter.

God sees the little sparrow fall.
It meets his tender view.
If God so loved the little birds,
I know God loves you too.

Thanks be to God. Amen.