

PREPARING AT HOME

June 19-25, 2017

Focus reading: Matthew 10:24–39 (<http://bible.oremus.org/?q=363332863>)

Other lectionary readings: Genesis 21:8–21; Psalm 86:1–10, 16–17; Romans 6:1b–11

Theme: God and Sparrows

This week's difficult reading may cause us to feel conflicted. On the one hand, we are assured that we are intimately known and valued by our Creator, who knows the number of hairs on our heads (verse 30). Yet, we are not assured of God's unconditional love. Instead, we are told that Christ will deny those who deny him (verse 33). Perhaps even more troubling is the message that Christ came to bring a sword (verse 34) and to tear families apart! If we are to grapple with these troubling words, we must consider their historical context. Matthew was writing to a predominantly Jewish audience for whom family obligations and religious laws and practices were strong forces that shaped one's identity. To follow Jesus in this culture was to separate oneself from the family and the religion that clung so tightly to tradition and rejected the way of Christ. Followers of Jesus often had no choice but to sever family ties. Scholars suggest that the "sword" referred to here may be metaphorical. The Roman Empire, swords on display, occupied the land. Rather than meeting force with force, Christ's followers are urged to cut through tradition and culture to embrace Christ's reign and work for justice. Christ's demands are risky, but God will care for the faithful even as God cares for a sparrow that falls. We need not fear the fall or try to escape it, but trust in God to carry us through it.

I AM VALUABLE TO GOD

We are more valuable to God than the sparrows. God knows the number of hairs on our heads. What does God know about you? Draw a self-portrait, showing some of the things that make you unique. Draw yourself doing something you love or holding something that is important to you. Around the portrait place words around that say something about you and what makes you special. How many hairs do you think are on your head? Does God know you better than you know yourself? What does God know about you that no one else knows?

THE CROSS

What does the cross mean to you? Make a cross out of paper, sticks, buttons, fabric, or whatever you can find. What are you afraid of? Write the answer on a piece of paper or draw a picture. Incorporate this into your cross.

PRAYER

Loving God,
We confess that it is sometimes hard to stand up for Jesus
and what he would want us to do.
We are afraid of being different, getting teased.
Turn our fear into trust
So that we can put you first,
remembering that you know all about us and love us.
Amen.

Prospect Presbyterian Church, Maplewood, NJ, www.prospectchurch.org

Rita Boyer, rita@prospectchurch.org