

Reading:

Matthew 10 He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil^a spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,^b drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. ⁹ Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; ¹⁰ take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.

¹¹ “Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. ¹² As you enter the home, give it your greeting. ¹³ If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. ¹⁶ I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

¹⁷ “Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. ¹⁸ On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

²¹ “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ²² All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. ²³ When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

²⁴ “A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul,^c how much more the members of his household!

²⁶ “So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark,

speaking in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. ²⁸ Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny^d? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

³² "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn

"a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—

³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."^e

³⁷ "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰ "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

Sermon

The textverses for the sermon are 29-31.

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny^d? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

The background of our reading is quite a remarkable statement from Matthew the gospel writer who intended his Gospel for the Jews. In our reading Jesus sends out his disciples and commanded them to go to the lost sheep of Israel. In doing so

they will experience suffering and will be ill treated. But they must continue despite all their difficulties and persevere, because He will be with them.

He will protect them just as He protects the “worthless sparrows”. Sparrows were one of the cheapest items sold for poor people’s food in the marketplace, the cheapest of all birds. Two were here purchased for an *assarion*, a small copper coin of little value (less than an hour’s work). If God cares for something as cheap as sparrows, how much more does He care for people!

Is this not a powerful way to express God’s caring love by way of a comparison to two sparrows? Yes indeed the sparrows is the symbol of God’s merciful love - His love that we celebrate today with the baptism of Leah and Holy Communion.

It reminds me of what happened a long time ago in South Africa.

During the second Anglo-Boer war, in a concentration camp, a woman called Anette Marais sat on a stone in the middle of a group of other tired and dirty women. During the night she wrestled with God and begged Him to send them a message of hope because as the war was dragging on, more children and women died in the camps of malnutrition, lack of medical care and starvation.

She opened her bible and read the words of Matthew 10 verse 29: “Are not two sparrows sold for an assarion and yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.”

While she was reading this verse a sparrow came and sat on her shoulder. All the women could just sit and stare. And in that moment the sparrow became their symbol of hope in their dire circumstances in the concentration camp near Bethulie. It was also to them a sure sign that God had not forgotten them and that He would liberate them.

So when peace was declared in 1902, Anette went back to her house that was burned to the ground. On the way home, she stopped at a friend’s house. She told her their story of the sparrow being their symbol of hope. The friend told General Smuts and when he became Prime minister in 1923 decided to use the two sparrows as an emblem on the countries smallest coin, which was then the quarter penny! Later it would become the emblem on the cent coins.

So every time now, when I see a small “cent coin” I think of the powerful sparrow message of God. To me it has become also a symbol of God’s Almighty presence.

SO I wish I had more ONE cent coins to dish out in my ministry. I would like to give them to each and every child I baptize, to tell them of God's promise to be with us, despite our circumstances.

So Elizabeth and Calum I want to hand you "South African cent" as a symbol of hope to you as you raise Leah to God's will and purpose. May you always look at the two wee sparrows on the coin and be reminded that God is close to you, to help and guide you. May you hand this coin to her one day so that to her it also can become a symbol of God's Almighty presence!

I would like to give them to everyone:

- that is struggling with cancer and other diseases,
- that is suffering with mental health issues,
- that has lost a limb,
- that is undergoing surgery,
- who is alone,
- who have lost a child,
- who have lost a husband, wife or partner,
- that is finding life so difficult,
- who is crying more than laughing,

If any one of you would like a South African cent, please just ask!

After all, in the same way, is baptism and communion a confirmation to us that God loved us so much that He gave us His Only Son. Baptism and communion is also a symbol of God's presence and grace in our busy lives.

Amen

a Greek *unclean*

b The Greek word was used for various diseases affecting the skin—not necessarily leprosy.

c Greek *Beezeboul* or *Beelzeboul*

d Greek *an assarion*

e Micah 7:6

d Greek *an assarion*