

Luke 12:1–7 | *That Crowd of Many Thousands*
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Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church | Glendale, AZ

On several occasions, Jesus told his disciples how God cares for even the little things, like the sparrows, you know, the cheap and small ones you could buy two-for-one for a single penny. Despite their cheapness and smallness, though, Jesus told his disciples how God legitimately cares for them, and how if he cares about even the small, the insignificant things...what makes you think, he wouldn't or doesn't care about you?

Maybe you've had this thought before, or at least been tempted by it: that God doesn't really care about you and your every-day struggles. It can cross our minds when life gets difficult, when homework and bills and problems just pile high, when the day-to-day gets overwhelming, when someone, somewhere criticizes you, to your face, about what you believe. Doesn't God care enough to step in? to lend a hand? to make the problem go away or at least just make it a little bit easier?

In our text for today, as they are surrounded by a crowd of many thousands, Jesus reminds his disciples—and reminds us—that we don't need to be afraid of those who would disagree with us or even try to harm us, we don't need to fear persecution, we don't need to worry about life's difficulties, because finally, we fear and trust the one who has ultimate authority and power over all things; we have God himself on our side, who *truly* values and cares about us.

Listen again to what he says, in the Gospel according to St. Luke, chapter 12, beginning at verse 1...

¹ Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ³ What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. ⁴ "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. ⁷ Indeed, the very hairs on your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

When life gets tough, these few verses can become more difficult to remember. In our imperfection and brokenness, we can sometimes be tempted to think that following God, that devoting ourselves to Jesus and his message of forgiveness, that being a Christian day in and day out—not just on Sundays; not just in chapel or in church or on campus—but being, living as an every-day Christian, we can sometimes be tempted to think it isn't always worth the trouble that inevitably comes with it, especially in our day and age.

Sure, it's easy to wear our faith on our sleeves while we're in church. Wearing your faith on your sleeve is easy when everybody around you is doing the same thing with the same faith. And what a huge blessing it is that we're surrounded by fellow believers, a congregation that cares for and supports one another! But what happens when you go out of those doors and leave the parking lot? What happens when you go to your job or to the store, where actively avoiding "religion talk" with others seems to be the norm? Is it easy to wear your faith on your sleeve then? Or what about when you interact with that one family member, who never fails to question your decision to financially support your church or the ministries it facilitates, when they say something like: "Ugh, what a waste of time and money. You could be doing so much more doing this, that, or the other thing"? Is it easy to wear your faith on your sleeve then?

Or what about when we just go out into the "real world," where proclaiming what we believe and why we believe it is bound to "offend" somebody and what they believe and how that's not fair? Is it easy when we remember that we live in a world where "shouting our faith" is often drowned out by louder shouts from bigger rooftops of differing beliefs and conflicting worldviews, where just about everything is permissible, no matter how crude, where the bumper stickers too often read "I'm sinful and proud of it"?

Is it easy, when everybody in that crowd of many thousands out there in the world, seems to all be shouting something different? Is it easy to wear our faith on our sleeves *then*? Or do we find ourselves sometimes...whispering it behind closed doors? Doing just what we're comfortable with, where we are, with those we know? Thinking, "Does it *really* matter how much I—me personally, or you personally—'shout it from the rooftops'? I mean, come on: do I matter in the grand scheme of things, in God's great plan for the world? I'm pretty sure he can do just fine without me 'shouting about him from the rooftops.' Because let's be honest, none of this is easy, not for little ol' me." Have you ever thought that? Maybe. Maybe not. But, brothers and sisters, if God cares about even the little things, the insignificant things, the sparrows of this world, what makes you think he doesn't care about you

and your struggles and your challenges as you live your faith? You, you are worth **much** more than these. So much so, that he knows everything there is to know about you. He has the hairs on your head numbered, all 150,000 of them (on average), down to each individual detail of each individual hair; that even if a single strand falls, he knows *exactly* which one it is.

Sure, that God knows all things isn't all that surprising, but that he cares enough to let us know? and then to immediately tell us we're worth much more than we think? That should remove any and all doubt we have about how he *feels* about us and how he *wants* to work **in** us and **through** us in his grand scheme of things, his great plan for the world: to seek and to save the lost by means of the precious gospel, as he works through its proclaimers like you and me, to reach that crowd of many thousands...

...with that message of grace alone: that our hope of eternal life isn't based on *who* we are or *what* we've done. It's ours because God looked at us and who we are and what we've failed to do, at our sins, at our wretchedness, at our hypocritical hearts—at all our smallness and insignificance by nature—at all the things that *would* have and *should* have moved him to condemn us to hell, at everything that *makes* us unlovable, he looked at us...and instead he said...

"I'm going to love them anyway. I'm going to redeem them with my own blood. I'm going to make them my own, no matter what they've done or who they are. And I'm going to work in and through them to spread this good news of salvation by *grace* alone through *faith* alone in *Christ* alone, and they will shout it from the rooftops. No matter the *danger*, no matter the *doubt*. Not out of *fear* of men, but out of *faith* in me. Because each and every single one of them in that crowd of many thousands the world over, they *need* to hear it. Because they **matter** to me."

Why? Because God is the God of free and faithful grace, who promised to save, who kept that promise perfectly. He's the God who has made you his own through baptism and draws you closer to himself in communion. He's the one who strengthens you through his Word and comforts you in every trial, every trouble, every moment of weakness, every fleeting fear, every lasting pain, every lingering sorrow, as he upholds you day by day, **every** day. And he reassures you with this undeniable, unshakable truth: you, my friends, *you* are worth **so** much to him.

So don't be afraid. Don't let the fear of public opinion or public shame or public disgrace stand in your way of telling others about their Savior. Don't let the fear of persecution stop you in your tracks when witnessing to others about God's love for them. Don't hide the reason for your hope of eternal life, don't hide it behind closed doors; **shout** it from the rooftops with *courage* and *confidence*, in the way you

speak, the way you act, the way you live...the way you lovingly serve, your God and your neighbor, day by day, **every** day.

Above all, dear friends, don't *fear* the world or *any* of its troubles. Instead, fear and love *God*, fear and love the *Lord* your *Savior*, who has overcome the world and **all** of its troubles...for you and for me, and for them, that crowd of many thousands. God grant it. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.