

Pentecost 6, 2008
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Matthew 10: 24 – 39

The sermon text today is that Gospel lesson I just read, from Matthew chapter 10. I invite you to keep it handy, and refer to it from time to time, as we proceed.

The Lord be with you. And let us pray:
Heavenly Father, in love you created us and all living things, and with greater love still you saved us by the gift of your Son. Teach us Father to love as you love, and to live as you command. Forgive us, change us, renew us, lead us, and on the last day take us to your home in heaven, where we shall know in full what we now only grasp in part; through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN.

Well of all the topics you ever expect to hear about in a church, there's maybe none so obvious as this one: Luv. Luv, we just luv one another here, and we luv to talk about it. We luv one another the way God first luv'd us, and luv luv luv, Jesus and God it's all about luv, isn't it?—and sure enough. Sure enough, God's *love* was in fact the subject one day this past week in our Vacation Bible School; and surprise surprise God's love is also the subject I'd like to talk about today. But I think what we'll find is, that though on one level the love of God is something even the smallest of children can understand, still. In the Christian scheme of things, there's a bit more to it than that. And we as adults can only really begin to grasp what all it means.

So the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 10, and the subject of God's love, first of all, look at verses 29 and 30. God knows what happens to the sparrows. God **cares** what happens to the sparrows, and aren't you more important to God than sparrows? Aren't you? Of course you are! And don't you realize, God knows you so well He's got the hairs of your head all numbered! Don't you see that God loves you so deeply He's got your whole life in His hands. Please **do** understand this, these verses tell us today: God loved you enough to give you life in the first place, He loves you enough to care for you and provide for you every single day. And He loves you enough to offer you a home in heaven, through Jesus Christ who died and rose again, this is the part about God's love that's easiest to talk about, especially with children. "Look at how much God cares, look at what all God has done for you!" And it's true. And it's important. And it's always where we

begin, when thinking about God's love for us.

But it's not where we end. Verse 34 in the text. "Do not think," Jesus says, "that I have come to bring peace to the earth. No, not peace, but a sword"? Now plainly, this is not the sugar-coated Jesus we like to talk about with children. This **is** the same loving God, but somehow different from the image of the kindly Father counting the hairs on our heads. This is the God, who really does expect His children, to grow up.

Not peace, but a challenge. Not peace, but a call. Not staying right where you are, not being content with a just a veneer of goodness and virtue, not when the Lord Himself has taken aim at your heart. Not peace, not rest, not contentment—not till Jesus has made you inside and out, the person God wants you to be. This is what's hard to explain to children, and maybe adults too—how God can "love you just the way you are," and still expect you, to change.

But He does. So think with me: Just what exactly are the sins in your life right now, anyway. We all made a vague confession today, standing together reading from the front part of the green hymnal—but that's the easy part. What has God laid on your heart right now, so to speak, what are the sins in your life right now you know you need to confess, what are the habits you know you need to outgrow? Think about your relationships—friends, neighbors; family. Your choices, and your priorities. How seriously do you take this Jesus thing anyway—good for the kids one week a year in Bible school? Nice air conditioned place to hang out on a Sunday morning in the summer? Or the very center of your life, your calling now your purpose now; your destiny forever; God does love you and the sparrows too and He loves you "just the way you are." But God loves you *more* than the sparrows, you see. That's why He expects you to grow up. That's why He expects you to change.

Total acceptance, total providential care, even the hairs on your head are numbered. Yet uncompromising expectation, a path in life that you also are called to follow. And where the acceptance meets the expectation, is always at the foot of the cross; the path we are to walk is the way of the cross. Jesus died to forgive us and rose again to save us, He gives us all this new and

eternal kind of life but He wants to make clear: If you want to grab hold of this new and eternal life. The only way, is to let go of the old one. Pick up your cross, take hold of the cross and follow me, Jesus says. Lose your life, and in so doing find your life, now and forever. Try explaining that to children in Bible School, I don't know, we can try, we can start. But we won't any of us *end*, till we stand before His throne in heaven and know in full, the love we now grasp only in part. May that day come quickly, and may we be found faithful in every way when it does; in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.