

## Precious in His Sight

**Proper 7, Year A – Matthew 10:24-39**

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, June 22, 2014*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

I ended up spending a lot of time this week dealing with the joyous fact that the first session of camp at All Saints starts this *very* afternoon. There were parents to talk to, checks to write, transportation to arrange, that sort of thing. And you know me and our young people – I was enjoying every minute of it. But between all that camp stuff and this morning's reading from Matthew's Gospel, at some point, I got headed down memory lane.

Eighteen years ago, this very week, as a new priest in the Diocese of Alabama, I served my first tour of camp duty at their equivalent to All Saints, Camp McDowell, among with 135 eight- to ten-year-olds. I learned a lot of neat things in those few days that have stayed in my mind and in my heart all these years. I learned a cute little song about Moses to the tune of "Louie, Louie" complete with some really fun hand and body motions. I discovered a story – a take-off of the fairy tale, "The Gingerbread Man" – called "The Stinky Cheese Man." I know it sounds weird, but trust me, if you're a nine- or ten-year-old boy, the phrase, "Run, run, run, as fast as you can, you can't catch me, I'm the Stinky Cheese Man!" is a *real* hoot. And that week so long now in the past, I learned everything there is to know about a substance called gimp. For those of you who may be uninitiated in the ways of camp lore, or maybe just call the stuff by some other name, gimp is that thin, flat plastic cording used for suspending name tags, braiding lanyards and, as best I have ever been able to determine, about a hundred and one other camp uses. It's strong, useful, and because it comes in about a million different colors, cool *looking*.

That week was filled with time at the pool, with programs, with noisy dining hall meals, and with a thousand other camp activities – a week, I am happy to say, that has been repeated many times in the years since. But my memory this week kept going back to one particular *very* warm afternoon in the arts and crafts hut. The project that afternoon was to make little crosses by carefully stringing small plastic beads onto a strand of fishing line, then suspending the resulting work of art from a piece of gimp to be worn around the proud maker's neck.

Long after everyone else was busy stringing their beads, one little boy, eight-year-old Perry, was still picking through the big container of beads, meticulously selecting only the ones that shone with a pearly iridescence. Having finally completed his selection, the boy cradled the shiny treasures in both hands and walked back to his seat in small, careful, measured steps. When he finally got to his place he slowly poured his pearly handful onto the paper plate that defined his work area. I decided he probably needed some help catching up with the others, who were already well into the project. Hanging over his little shoulders, I repeated the instructions that had already been given by the craft instructor. His small fingers deftly strung the tiny beads into their proper places.

Just when he was almost finished, one of Perry's little beads began to roll away from where he had laid them. I watched as it picked up speed as it got closer, and closer, and closer to the edge of the table. Just in the nick of time, the boy snatched it up and unceremoniously plopped it back on the plate, just as I cautioned, "You'd better keep an eye on those beads, hon'." The boy turned to me with a smile and a look at me almost... indulgently as he said, "Father, I'm even being careful with the *gimp*." Though he was too polite to say it this way, it was as *if* he had told me, "If I'm going to watch out for the little string that it goes on, you can bet that nothing is going to happen to the things that are really *special* to me."

Right *then* I new the real worth of those pearly beads to that one little boy.

In our Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus is giving his disciples instructions in preparation for sending them out on their first mission to spread the good news of God's Kingdom. "I am sending you out like sheep," Jesus tells them just before today's portion, "into the midst of wolves."

"Yet do not be afraid," Jesus continues. His reasoning is clear and concise. Regardless of the danger, he says, they *will* be protected because they are *precious* to him and to the Father who sent him. Jesus reminds his disciples of God's constant watchfulness even over the sparrows sold in the marketplace, two for a penny. The Father, he says, sees the comings and goings of even these tiniest of his creatures. There's not a single feather, not a single beat of the wings, that isn't as important to the Creator as all of the rest of the universe. The Father's even being careful with the *gimp*, so you can bet that nothing is going to happen to the things that are really *special* to him.

We have a relatively easy time seeing ourselves as the *gimp* of creation. We can have our moments of strength. We can sometimes feel useful to God's purposes. Some of us can even be *decorative* every now and then. As Christians we are reminded over and over again that we are part of God's plan, a necessary and productive part of spreading the Word of the Father to a world that doesn't always even *want* to hear it.

But I wonder how often we stop to realize just how *special* we really are. The Father sees us as so much more than necessary and productive. We aren't the *gimp* of creation, but the Creator's absolute treasure. We are his prized jewels. We are his beautiful, pearly, iridescent beads, his pearls of great price! And if he is careful with even the *gimp*, just imagine how he feels about *us*.

There is certainly nowhere we can go, there is certainly nothing we can do, there is certainly no time in our lives, that we are not under the Father's watchful care. What could be more assuring than that? What could be more magnificent? What could be more glorious, than to be held as the absolute treasure of the very one who made us for himself?

I know I've talked about my father an awfully lot here lately, but there's an old song based on this morning's passage from Matthew, a song that I used to hear a lot when I was a kid, because it was one of my Dad's favorites. I suppose over the years, it has become one of my theme songs, a song I find myself humming or whistling as I go through my day here at the church. It has, of course, run in and out of my head with special frequency this past week. The chorus, in particular, rings in my mind:

I sing because I'm happy,  
I sing because I'm free.  
For His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I *know* He watches me.

Oh... Thanks be to God!