

**Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta**  
**“Fully Known and Fully Loved” (Matthew 10:29-31)**  
**June 21, 2020**  
**Dave Johnson**

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On this Father’s Day I am preaching an unapologetically sappy sermon about the love of our Heavenly Father for you.

If I were to ask you to describe your relationship with your earthly father, what would you say? Some of you may be very close to your earthly father—he may be a hero for you whose love and support for you through the years has been unwavering, who has been present and steadfast through the ups and downs of your life. Some of you may have a strained relationship with your father because of past hurts or unrealistic expectations or vastly different personalities and interests—you just don’t click or connect. When it comes to your earthly father some of you may have an outright hostile relationship—or perhaps no relationship at all.

Regardless of what your relationship with your earthly father is like, scripture is clear that when it comes to God, your Heavenly Father, you are fully known and fully loved, more than you could ever imagine. Three weeks ago we celebrated Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early church. One of the primary ways the Holy Spirit works in our lives is assuring us of our identity as beloved children of God, our identity as beloved children of our Heavenly Father—as John wrote, “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are” (1 John 3:1). The Apostle Paul put it this way:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God (Galatians 4:4-7; see also Romans 8:14-16).

The good news of the gospel on this Father's Day is that you are a fully known and fully loved child of your Heavenly Father. That is why Jesus literally taught us to pray to "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). And in today's gospel reading Jesus preached about the love and care of your Heavenly Father for you:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31).

"Even the hairs of your head are all counted," Jesus said. That is the level of care God has about the details in your life. What would you guess is the average number of hairs on the human head? Believe it or not, it actually varies according to hair color. Those with blonde hair average about 150,000, those with brown or black hair about 100,000, and those with red hair about 90,000. Of course, if you have some baldness like me, the numbers plummet accordingly. But regardless of what color the hair on your head is, or whether you have any at all, your Heavenly Father knows and cares about it, and knows and cares about every detail in your life. You are fully known and fully loved by your Heavenly Father.

"You are of more value than many sparrows," Jesus said. There are tens of millions of sparrows in North America alone. God not only knows and cares about each one, but also knows and cares about you even more. Along these lines, in 1905 a lady named Civilla Martin was traveling with her husband in upstate New York, where they visited their close friends, the Doolittle's. Although Mr. Doolittle was wheelchair bound and Mrs. Doolittle was bedridden, they had no doubt about the love of their Heavenly Father for them, as Civilla recalled:

Despite their afflictions, they lived happy Christian lives, bringing inspiration and comfort to all who knew them. One day while we were visiting with the Doolittle's, my husband commented on their bright hopefulness and asked them for the secret of it. Mrs. Doolittle's reply was simple: "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me." The beauty of this simple expression of boundless faith gripped the hearts and fired the imagination of Dr. Martin and me (Vincent Homan, *A Foot in Two Worlds* 112).

And in that moment Civilla Martin was inspired to write a beloved gospel hymn that reminds us of how much our Heavenly Father indeed cares for us:

Why should I feel discouraged?  
And why should the shadows come?  
Why should my heart feel lonely and long for heaven and home?  
When Jesus is my portion, a constant friend is He  
His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches over me  
His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches over me  
I sing because I'm happy  
I sing because I'm free  
His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches over me

You are fully known and fully loved by your Heavenly Father, who indeed watches over you. This is especially good news in these trying times. Speaking of gospel music, recently *The New York Times* published an interview with the legendary Bob Dylan. Among the many topics covered was Dylan's friendship with another musical legend, the late Little Richard, who wrote gospel music in addition to rock 'n roll. Douglas Brinkley asked Dylan, "Why didn't more people pay attention to Little Richard's gospel music?" Dylan's response is fascinating:

Probably because gospel music is the music of good news and in these days there just isn't any. Good news in today's world is like a fugitive, treated like a hoodlum and put on the run. Castigated. All we see is good-for-nothing news... It stirs people up. Gossip and dirty laundry. Dark news that depresses and horrifies you.

Who can argue with that? But then Dylan describes the opposite effect of the good news of the gospel about which Little Richard sang:

On the other hand, gospel news is exemplary. It can give you courage. You can pace your life accordingly, or try to, anyway. And you can do it with honor and principles... Little Richard was a great gospel singer. But I think he was looked at as an outsider or an interloper in the gospel world. They didn't accept him there. And of course the rock 'n' roll world wanted to keep him singing "Good Golly, Miss Molly." So his gospel music wasn't accepted in either world (June 12, 2020).

And again, part of the “exemplary” gospel that indeed “can give you courage” in these trying times is that you are fully known and fully loved by your Heavenly Father, who cares about every detail in your life and watches over you. On the final song of his 1981 album *Shot of Love* Dylan sings about this:

In the time of my confession, in the hour of my deepest need  
When the pool of tears beneath my feet flood every newborn seed  
There’s a dyin’ voice within me reaching our somewhere  
Toiling in the danger and in the morals of despair...  
In the fury of the moment I can see the Master’s hand  
In every leaf that trembles, in every grain of sand...  
Then onward in my journey I come to understand  
That every hair is numbered like every grain of sand...  
I am hanging in the balance of the reality of man  
Like every sparrow falling, like every grain of sand  
(From “Every Grain of Sand”)

One more illustration and then I’ll close...like millions of others I am big fan of both *Star Wars* and Shakespeare. The *Star Wars* saga is replete with father/child dynamics, from Darth Vader being revealed as the father of Princess Leia and Luke Skywalker, to Kylo Ren killing his father Han Solo in *The Force Awakens*. A creative writer named Ian Doescher has rewritten the *Star Wars* film stories as Shakespearean plays, each film rendered as a five act play in iambic pentameter and Elizabethan English—totally nerdy, totally amazing. In his volume, *The Force Doth Awaken* he recounts what happened when Han Solo tries to persuade his estranged son Kylo Ren from following to the evil Empire leader Snoke, only to have Kylo Ren respond, “Tis too late.” Then Han Solo continues:

Han           Nay, never. Come, return unto thy home.  
                  We miss thy gentle presence in our lives.  
                  ‘Tis not too late—‘tis never too late, my son.

Kylo           I do confess that I am torn asunder.  
                  From all this pain I fain would be set free.  
                  I know what I must do, yet fear I’ve not  
                  The strength to make it so. O wilt thou help?  
(Kylo Ren reaches to hand Han his lightsaber)

Han           Of course, whate'er thou wishest, my sweet boy—  
                  Thou bring'st and e'er did bring me such great joy.

Kylo (aside) Beyond the chamber dies the light outside,  
                  An 'twere the light within my very soul—  
                  Thus in my core doth darkness reign at last.  
                  (Kylo Ren turns on his lightsaber and runs Han through)

As his life departs from him, Han Solo gently places his hand on his son's face:

Han           My son, whose face is still so dear to me—  
                  O, how I see thy mother still in thee (142-143).

Han Solo's love for his son, Kylo Ren, literally cost him his life, and yet even as he died, his love for son still remained unchanged—"my son, whose face is still dear to me." That mirrors your Heavenly Father's love for you.

And on Good Friday your Heavenly Father proved once and for all that you are fully known and fully loved, in giving his only Son Jesus to die on the cross for you—as scripture tells us, "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

On the cross every numbered hair on Jesus' sacred head was matted down with sweat and blood—every numbered hair on Jesus' sacred head tangled up in a crown of thorns—and as a sparrow gently falls to the ground, Jesus' sacred head gently fell to his chest as he gasped his final breath. And the heart of your Heavenly Father broke—and yet that is how much you are loved by God.

And for any of you who may feel estranged from God on this Father's Day, Han Solo's words to Kylo Ren are your Heavenly Father's words to you, "'Tis not too late—'tis never too late, my son."

Today may the Holy Spirit assure you anew in your heart that no matter what, you are fully known and fully loved by your Heavenly Father, who cares about every detail in your life, and who watches over you even now.

Amen.