



Pentecost 2: June 22, 2014
Tri-Parish Worship and Picnic in Surrey
The Rt. Rev. Melissa M. Skelton

Matthew 10:24-39

Jesus said to the twelve disciples,

"A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 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.

"Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

"For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,

and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

What a weighty and dense gospel reading for such a delightful outdoor celebration. I had so hoped to make something of the section on sparrows in this Gospel as a way of connecting it to our outdoor setting this morning, but to no avail. Rather, the very last line of the Gospel caught me as it often does when it comes around in its many forms in our lectionary cycle:

"Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

And so let me tell you a story about finding and losing and say a little about why this is so connected to Christian life. Strangely enough, the story is about birds.

Once upon a time in Seattle, Washington, a woman with short grey hair and an energetic spring in her step hung a little bird house in her backyard. Someone had given it to her, so she hung it from the fence right at eye level, never thinking that any bird would ever take up residence there.

Within a week, however, two little wrens began buzzing around in the back yard, trilling their little songs and hauling twigs and bits of grass into the birdhouse. Soon they had built a small nest. The woman with short grey hair and the energetic spring in her step was ecstatic and began looking into the bird house the first thing every morning and every evening before the sun went down.

One morning when she was looking into the birdhouse, she saw one of the wrens sitting inside on the nest quivering. When she looked in again at the end of the day before the sun went down, the bird was still at it. "What could it be?" she said to herself, hoping nothing was wrong.

The next morning she got up and ran to the nest in the birdhouse and found that the bird was still there but had stopped its quivering. A few hours later, the bird flew out of the nest, and the woman was amazed to discover five, yes, five little eggs in the nest.

For the next few weeks the wren sat on the nest as her mate brought her food. And then one morning when the woman with the short grey hair and the spring in her step went out and checked the nest, behold, five little yellow beaks were where the eggs had been before.

Day after day, both wrens began bringing food to the birdhouse. And over time the five little yellow beaks turned into five feathery fluffy balls until there was barely enough room for

them all in the nest inside the birdhouse hung on the fence in the little back yard in Seattle, Washington

The woman with the short grey hair and the spring in her step was elated. “How fine they are doing,” she said to herself. “How delightful it is to have them here as a part of my little back yard.”

But the very next morning when she went to check the nest in the birdhouse, not a single yellow beak, not a single feathery fluffy ball, not a single mother or father wren was there. All had flown. All had gone the way that birds most go: into the trees and into the air.

For days the spring in the woman’s step was gone. And then a week or so later, it returned as she turned to the next thing.

Now you may think that the center of the story I’ve just told you is the woman with the grey hair and the spring in her step—for as the story unfolds she finds something quite wonderful and then has to lose it. But if we look closer what we may see is that the story of the birds, themselves, is about the steady and repetitive movement from finding to losing to finding to losing and so on and so on.

Ron Rolheiser in his book entitled *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* says that this pattern of finding and losing is the Paschal Mystery at the very centre of the Christian life. “In order to come to fuller life and spirit we must constantly be letting go of present life and spirit”—this is the Paschal mystery, he says.

He goes on, then to give some examples of this in our lives:

- We must let go of our attachment to our youth in order to receive the gift of living fully at every age of our lives.
- We must let go of some of our dreams of completion and consummation in order to receive the beautiful and unfinished symphony that is our life.
- We must let go of what he calls our relationship “honeymoons” in order to receive the gift of the relationships we have actually been given
- And finally, we must let go of some of our past notions of God and the Church in order to receive the God and the Church that are right in front of us today.

And so those wondrous wrens in the woman’s back yard were without awareness letting go of or losing one thing after another in order to get to the next larger thing: their unencumbered status, their eggs, their dependent young, and finally the nest. And then the woman, herself, was not just asked but made to let go of something that gave her great delight in order that those same creatures might go on to be who and what they were meant to be: birds of the air and of the trees.

These then are both the aspects of what I understand to be the Paschal Mystery central to Christian life. Just like Christ, himself, we must lose what we have found, we must let go of something we would rather not let go of in order to receive the greater thing that is next.

And in addition there will be times, there are times when we must lose or let go of something or someone so that *others* can receive the greater thing that is next *for them*.

This morning, where are you being asked to let go of something or someone so that you might have fuller life and spirit? What attachment do you need to turn loose of? What person or thing do you need to let go of? Or this: What might you need to give up in your life so that others might more fully live?

I can't speak for the birds of the air, but I can speak for the woman with short grey hair and a spring in her step when I say that losing what we have found, letting go of what we are holding onto is never easy. The promise of our God, however, is that this is God's way of expanding our lives and opening up a world kept small by our grasp. And so, let go. God is with you. Let go. God has a hold of the world.