

Along the track

Five Sparrows

"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Jesus asked. "Fear not, you are of more value than many sparrows."

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus again urges us "Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or stow away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26)

We may be tempted to think that Jesus lived in a much simpler age, where life was far less complex and less stressful, without the pressures and fears and anxieties we face today. We may be tempted to think that His message may have been OK for those times but a bit naïve or irrelevant to ours. But Jesus lived in very trying times in a country occupied by a foreign and very cruel power, where freedom was limited and human rights were virtually non-existent, where poverty and sickness were common. Superstition, suspicion and anxiety were commonplace and the pillars which gave stability and purpose to life, government and the faith he lived by had become corrupted. There was much discontent and frustration expressed by a yearning to restore the glories of the past – to 'make Israel great again.'

For many of us, we live in an age where we have never been healthier or wealthier. But we also live in an age of discontent and dissatisfaction. The media appears obsessed with the cult of celebrity, with fashion and consumerism, with violence and conflict, with suspicion of people who may be different feeds our anxiety and mistrust. Many feel angry and even fearful that others seem to be getting a better go than we are.

Jesus gave us a new story, a new narrative to live by, not hankering back to past days of glory and power but He spoke of a time of trust in God and in each other, of being at the service of others. Jesus invited us to share with others, to work with them to build the future. Restoring Israel's past was not about restoring past power and glory, Jesus said, but seeing ourselves as people loved by God, people striving together to bring into reality God's vision for our world.

That begins within each of us. It won't happen otherwise. It is not someone else's job. Today there is a lot of discontent, a lot of negativity. We hear

and see it in the streets, in homes, in our places of work and recreation, in our media. There is a lot of anger around, a negative attitude towards the world, always looking for someone to blame, having a chip on one's shoulder. That discontent and negativity and anger won't just go away. Each of us has to do something about it.

In the words of Fr Ronald Rolheiser:

Simply put, for all of us, adults, it is hard to be mellow, and easy to be bitter; it is hard to be embracing, and easy to be suspicious; it is hard to be open to delight, and easy to be angry; it is hard to be truly concerned about the wounds of others, and easy to be filled with self-pity; it is hard to be able to admire beauty, gift, and success in others; and easy to be jealous; it is hard to have a universal heart, and easy to be petty; it is hard to be honest about our own weaknesses and brokenness, and easy to blame; it is hard to be trustful, and easy to be suspicious; it is hard to have hope, and easy to be cynical; it is hard to have good manners, and easy to be uncouth; it is hard to be gentle, and easy to be harsh; it is hard to be gracious...

But that was and is the message of Jesus – that was part of his "Good News" for the world of His time and the world of our time. Making things great again is not about power and fame or riches and glory. It is about trusting in God and God's vision for our world, God's vision for what will make the world a fairer, more caring, more loving, more generous place. Believing in God, trusting in God means that sometimes we have to go against the tide, to take the road less travelled, to be generous in mind and heart and action when it is not 'fashionable' to do so.

Why the five sparrows? Because, in Jesus' eyes, everyone is important to God, everyone is precious, everyone is special, everyone has a purpose, a mission in life. Recognising that in heart and in action is a great place to start. We are asked to take on the mind and heart of God. Then we can begin to make things great again!

Regards
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