

Nothing Can Separate Us from God

**Ps 15 & Romans 8:31-39 – Sermon Text = Romans 8:38-39
574,727, 747, 746**

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present,
nor things to come, nor powers, nor height,
nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us
from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Rom 8:38-39)*

Rick Reynolds has me reading CK Barrett.
The 8th chapter of Romans, in Barrett's commentary on the book,
Is called Paul's 'hymn of triumph' to a God who is 'for us.'
Think on that for a moment longer.
Think about what we discovered in our meaning conversation this morning.
Ponder afresh what a difference it would make in your life
if you really, truly, deeply, consistently
kept in the front of your mind that God was totally and unconditionally for you.

Another way of understanding this transforming truth
is that God is paying attention to you so you can flourish as a blessing.
No matter how distracted you may become by your fears of others things,
God is never distracted in their attention to your wellbeing.
(as a sidebar, you will note again
that I played with the grammar in that previous sentence
to remind us that one way of thinking of God is as a community –
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the traditional wording,
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer as we add here at Brentwood,
bass, piano, and drums as I am playing around with a jazz analogy.)

There is a wonderful gospel song that Darlene Ketchum sings
called 'His Eye is on the Sparrow.'
It's based the words of Jesus recoded in Matt 6:26
and draws our attention to the care of God for all creatures,
but especially for us human beings.

It was written by Civilla Durfee Martin, a Canadian, born in Jordon Falls, NS, on 21 Aug
1869. She married Dr. Walter Martin, an evangelist
who had studied at Harvard and became a minister in the Disciples of Christ.

This is her account of the writing of the song:

“Early in the spring of 1905, my husband and I were sojourning in Elmira, New York. We contracted a deep friendship for a couple by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Doolittle – true saints of God. Mrs. Doolittle had been bedridden for nigh twenty years. Her husband was an incurable cripple who had to propel himself to and from business in a wheel chair. 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 Doolittles, 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. The hymn “His Eye Is On The Sparrow” was the outcome of that experience.” After writing the words, she mailed it to Charles Gabriel to write the music. Gabriel came from a Presbyterian background and is credited with over 7,000 hymn compositions. Here are the words:

*Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heav’n and home,
When Jesus is my portion? My constant Friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.*

Refrain:

*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.*

*“Let not your heart be troubled,” His tender word I hear,
And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;
Though by the path He leadeth, but one step I may see;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.*

*Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,
When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies,
I draw the closer to Him, from care He sets me free;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.*

Most weeks I spend a bit of time on Monday morning
looking over a weekly email called BrainPickings.

It’s a marvellous collection of quotes
from some of the great thinkers and writers of the world.

This week Simone Weil was featured.

She was a French philosopher, Christian mystic, and political activist
who was a trade-unionist in the late 1930s

and in the French Resistance during the Second World War.
She contracted tuberculosis and dies of cardiac failure in 1943
at the tragically-young age of 43.

Much of her writing was published after her death.
The quote that stuck with me this week from BrainPickings
had to do with the idea of 'attention.'
It's from her *First and Last Notebooks*.

Attention is the rarest and purest form of gratitude.

I couldn't help but read this passage from Paul
in the light of that gem of wisdom this week.

For Paul, God's attention is always on us.
His eye is always attentive to us and our needs.
His energy, his glory, his grace is always flowing through us and around us
to enable us to flourish so we can be blessings in his world.
And nothing in all creation can divert that divine, loving attention being for us.

And here's the new perspective that Weil provoked in me this week.
That divine attention is gratitude.
God is grateful for us.

His attention is 'the rarest and purest form of gratitude.'
That's a whole new take on 'God for us' in my realm of thinking.

What Paul is encouraging us to do in response to this kind of attention
is to respond in kind –
pay attention to God as a response of gratitude
for God's attentive gratitude for us.

Don't let anything get in the way of that attention,
because God is not letting anything get in the way of his attention to us.
In this hymn of triumph to God's attentive love and gratitude,
Paul lists every form of power, philosophy, and religion
that one would find in Rome and its empire
that would cause fear and distraction in his readers.
I know you can imagine parallels to those fears and distractions in our world today.
They all generate a sense of loneliness and fear.
They drive us to take refuge in false powers and gods.
They draw our attention away from the true God of the Gospel
and leave us feeling depressed and deprived
because nothing but God's attentive love will truly nourish wellbeing in us.

So, my invitation to you this week is to pay renewed attention
to God's attention to you and be grateful for that,
just as God is being grateful to you for your potential in his service.