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Preached at St. Christopher's Episcopal Church
Oak Park, Illinois
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First Reading: Isaiah 49:8-16a
Psalm 131
Second Reading: 1Corinthians 4:1-5
Gospel: 6:24-34

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever pleasing to you,
O God, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Jesus has been preaching to us from on top of that mountain for a few weeks now. And he says increasingly puzzling things. But this week takes the cake. Jesus says to us, calm as can be, we need to have the faith like the birds have faith. "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?"

Hold on a second. Birds? Is Jesus a theologian or an ornithologist? Maybe a birdwatcher? What do sparrows have to do with my faithfulness? I grant you that this kind of scripture looks great cross-stitched on a pillow, but it doesn't seem to make any sense. Of course birds don't worry. And I think I can tell you pretty quickly why that is. I have yet met a bird with a mortgage. Nor have I met a bird with student loans, kids with learning disabilities, doctor's bills, aging parents or any number of other legitimate worries that Jesus dismisses in today's Gospel. We sit at Jesus' feet for answers, and he tells to take up bird watching.

I'm not sure about you, but I don't stop and watch birds very often. In fact, I spend a fair portion of my week worrying about some problem or another. And I spend the rest of my week, using gadgets to somehow calm my own worry (The irony, by the way, was not lost on my last night as I worried about my sermon on the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says, Don't Worry). I have an application on my phone that spits out the credit card balance, the banking account figures and how much money will hopefully be available to me when I retire at 72 years young. I have another application on my phone that lets me enter the number and kind of calories I eat in a day so that I can hopefully: avoid diabetes, hypertension, heart attack and/or stroke. I have other programs that let me predict weather, stocks, read minute to minute news reports and keep up with an everlasting stream of Facebook status updates. I have a work computer and a home computer that magically sync up my work calendar and my home calendar. It even beeps at me before I need to be someplace, because I worry about forgetting all my obligations. Maybe I could find an application for my phone that could have faith for me, because it's safe to say, I don't have faith like the birds in Jesus' sermon. If you do, I am happy for you and envious of you.

I think some of us, brothers and sisters, are better than others at practicing this kind of bird faith--this kind of avian certitude. Maybe it's like being a gifted athlete or talented musician. Perhaps, when God was handing out the spiritual gifts, some of us received patience, gentleness, peace and kindness while other received faithfulness like a bird. This has to be the case, because I do meet people-- lay, ordained, old, young -- it doesn't really matter -- who seem to go through life with a spiritual serenity, a Godly equanimity. I admire these Christians, and I feel lucky when our paths cross.

My Dad was one of these fortunate folks. I think he may have had faith like a bird. I remember a car ride when I was about sixteen years old. I had just been to a leadership camp for young Christians, and I was riding in our dinged up family mini-van with my Dad. I turned to him and asked him what he thought would happen when he died. He said, in his folksy, Kansas-born accent -- 'Well Ian, I guess I will die and Jesus will come for me. Then Jesus will say 'Who Am I'? And I will say, you're God's Son. And that will be that.'

My Dad was able to reduce five thousand years of Scripture and two thousand years of Christian theology into a two second conversation with the Creator of the Universe.

Years later, as my Dad lay dying, he looked over at me and said "You know son, I will see you again before you see me." "I don't understand, Dad. What do you mean?" "Well," he said, "I can't imagine a God who would take me to heaven and make me wait around for my family. You will have to live your life here, and it will be many years before you see me, but when I die, I will see you again right away." My Dad just seemed to have an intuitive sense about God's providence and graciousness. He was probably part bird.

But, Merciful God, what is to be done for the rest of us--the ones without that kind of faith? Where will we go to receive our wings? Scripture has some ideas. The Church has some ideas. When in doubt, begin at the beginning. Every time we enter this space, we pass the baptismal fount. Think of it as our own, sacred bird bath. It stands at the entrance to our life together in community. It is the first symbol of Christian living, and the Sacrament from which all others flow. Three or four times a year, we take a little baby; incapable of cognition, incapable of theology, incapable of decision, incapable of worry, and we pour water of his or her head in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Then we hold this baby up and say to each other, this, THIS is faith.

Every baby knows already about this faith; every bird already knows about this faith. Those lucky folks with a gift for faith know about this faith. It's the rest of us who need help. This is why we remember our baptisms ritually at different parts of the year. We're asking God to stir up our ornithological (bird-like) faithfulness.

Behind me stands the largest and most expensive bird feeder in the free world. Every Sunday, the priest stands behind that altar and tells the story of the people of God. She starts and the flood and moves all the way to the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then she tells us that when we participate in this meal, we participate in that same Resurrection. It seems pretty far fetched, and yet we line up, faithfully, week after week.

Even the doubters. Even the worriers. Even the vaguely agnostic, the questioning, the seeking and the downright hostile. We line up and come to the table to participate in the very life of Christ.

And this is why the birds don't worry. Because they remember that God feeds God's creation. We don't need to fill the barn for wintertime, or worry about the future, because right here, right now, we are washed clean from beak to tail-feathers, and we are participating in God's feast for ever and ever and ever; world without end, Amen.