



Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,  
when song gives way 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.

*Refrain*

**Old Testament Reading** Proverbs 6: 20-22

**Gospel Reading** Matthew 10:24-39

### **Message**

Lloyd Watson was the 10<sup>th</sup> of 14 children growing up on a farm in Oklahoma. He was drafted in 1943 at age 18. His unit crossed the English Channel into France in December 1944 and he was soon thrust into combat. His unit relocated to Belgium when the Battle of the Bulge began. Sgt. Watson was a mortar platoon leader, battling the aggressive German defensive. He recalled how, under heavy shelling, he and a fellow Oklahoman began digging their foxholes, getting their first glimpse of the horrors of war in the dead lying all around them.

Giving a speech at his local public library many years later, he credited growing up on the family farm for being able to survive the German attack. "My dad was a strict person, not severe, but strict. He would send us out to do a job, and we didn't dare come back in and say this happened or that happened, or I just couldn't get that done. We used our ingenuity to overcome the problem and see that the job got done."

Maybe you can identify with this story. I sure do. My siblings and I were always expected to help with household chores and maintenance, inside and out, in good weather and bad, and excuses weren't tolerated. Lloyd Watson's point about ingenuity really struck home. That was one of my dad's favorite occupations...he loved a challenge and would study it, research it, talk to others about it, and then in exaggerated, and sometimes painfully slow detail, explain just exactly how we were going to approach the project. He had a favorite saying, which I'll clean up for church: "Well, we can do that, but it's gonna be a real-----!"

In today's text, Jesus prepares to send the disciples out into the mission field. He levels with them: it will be hard work. They will encounter opposition and even violence. But, regardless of the challenges, he expects them to get the job done.

Matthew includes this story in his gospel to encourage the early Christian missionaries. These new believers were going out into the world and would face abuse and rejection. Matthew wants them to know that the good news is God is with them and will equip them for their work.

A few months ago, we were planning a trip to England. The Coronavirus put an end to those plans. But weeks before the scheduled trip, we began to pack, laying out shoes and jackets and counting pairs of socks, and making sure we had European electric adapters.

Jesus tells his trainees how to pack. They are to travel light. No bag, no money, no belt, no extras. But before he sends them on their way, he huddles with them awhile, and they share a moment of deep communion.

There was, in that time, a rabbinic form of teaching called, “string of beads.” This involves the teacher giving a series of proverbial statements, admonitions, and advice, strung together along the thread of a single theme. The beads Jesus strings, in this text, are instructions about succeeding in getting the job done when the disciples carry the gospel message into the world on their own.

Here are a few of those sayings. Remember, his objective was to assure them that they could fulfill their mission, even when faced with adversity or worse.

1. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave his master.
2. Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.
3. Even the hairs on your head are counted.
4. Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But, whoever denies me before others, I will also deny before my Father in heaven.
5. I have come not to bring peace, but a sword.
6. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Some of these statements are rightly called “the hard sayings of Jesus.” There’s a sermon or three about those. Because it seems Jesus is saying that the disciples have to turn their backs on all they’ve known and loved and depended on, all they have worked hard to acquire or achieve, to be faithful to Jesus. Leave your family, behind. And your creature comforts, and your corner office with a view, and your platinum American Express Card.

In the days of the early Church, these missionaries had a singular purpose: to announce that the kingdom of heaven, that they had expected for generations, had arrived in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It was important that they have as few distractions and as little baggage as possible. This is the purpose, in some faith groups, in pastors, priests, and nuns taking vows of poverty.

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

All these statements speak to the circumstances they will encounter and how faithful people are to address them. These statements are strung together like beads on a thematic thread. Jesus wants his followers to wear these beads around their necks as they leave the community that has inspired them and strengthened them and bound them together, as they go into the hostile world.

A few years ago, we lost a beloved member of our extended family. Bob Zopp. Bob was my brother-in-law's father. Bob, or Coach Zopp, as he was better known, was well-loved and respected in the Greenbrier Valley. He coached a number of sports, but his best-loved game was football. He was head coach at Greenbrier East for many years. He loved young people, and many a testimony was shared during Bob's lifetime that credited him with guiding one student after another into a life of faith and integrity and purpose. He loved teaching and the school environment so much that he worked as a substitute teacher well into his 80s.

Bob was a devoted supporter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He worked with others to make summer sports camps available to young people. He traveled for the organization and became friends with people whose names you hear on Sunday afternoon TV in the fall.

But, none of that changed Bob, or turned his head. He was a humble man. Because his identity began with a simple truth: he was a child of God and a sinner saved by grace. And his response to that grace was a full and joyful life. He laughed easily and often. He had a light countenance.

At Bob's memorial service, we opened the bulletin, and there, in Bob's hand, were words of instruction that he kept in his well-worn Bible. At the top was written:

"How to become a Christian."

1. God loves you. John 3:16; 1 John 4:8b-10
2. You are a sinner. Isaiah 53:5; Romans 3:10
3. Sin separates you from God. Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:10
4. You can't save yourself. Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5
5. God has removed the sin barrier through his Son, Jesus Christ. Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21
6. You can receive Jesus Christ through faith. Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9-10
7. Through prayer, you can trust in Jesus Christ.
  - Admit you are a sinner.
  - Express sorrow, or repentance, for your sinfulness.
  - Ask Him to forgive your sins.
  - Invite Jesus into your life as Savior and Lord.
  - Thank Him for entering your life.

Commit yourself to live for Him.

This was Bob's string of beads. His call and his creed. His purpose.

What is on your string of beads?

### **Pastoral Prayer Concluding with the Lord's Prayer**

Good and gracious God, you have reached out to us in our distress and lifted us up. You give us new life and we are thankful. For some the past week has been good, but for others, it has brought trouble, disappointment, or hardship. We ask for a sense of your loving presence to accompany all your people, dear Lord. Heal our wounded spirits, calm our troubled dreams, bring peace to the unsettled, especially in those places where there is great division and violence. This day we lift to you the names of our fathers and those who have been like fathers to us. We thank you for their faithful lives, their generous spirits, their patience and support. We pray, too, for those who have not lived up to the role of father. Help us to forgive any human failing and remind us that you are our heavenly parent, in whose image we are made and for whom we live each day.

We lift to you those who are in need, in body, mind or circumstance. Bear with us, Lord, as we find our way through this difficult time in our nation and in the wider world. Guide our steps as we plan our return to the church for worship. Increase in us compassion, humility, insight and understanding, looking to the example of Jesus, our brother, who taught us to pray, Our Father...Amen.

### **Blessing**

As you go from here, remember that  
we are sons and daughters of God.  
We have been adopted into God's family,  
and have become God's heirs, and joint heirs with Christ Jesus.

So, go in peace and confidence,  
in the love of God,  
by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.. Amen.

### **Postlude**