

Proper 11 (16) - July 20, 2025

Baruch 2:11–15, 19–23; Psalm 18:2–11, 16–17; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–8; Luke 12:4–7

“Not forgotten by God”

1. One piece of advice I got as a photographer was this: take the picture you see in the viewfinder
 - a. That may seem like an overly obvious or logical statement, but it’s more important than what you may think.
 - i. When you’re taking pictures, you are experiencing reality through your eyes first
 - ii. You find something you want to capture in real life, and you get your camera or phone camera, and you shoot the picture.
 - iii. However, often the picture we thought we captured was what we had already captured in our MIND’S EYE, assuming that the camera would read our mind
 - iv. It can be disappointing when looking at the result. A cropped head, a subject not centered, back lighting that makes the subject too dark, etc.
 - v. Fortunately, in the era of digital, you can quickly check, and then just take it again, hopefully capturing the right image
 - b. I have been taking pictures since my brother Héctor gave me my first camera, I think it was a Kodak Instamatic, when I was about 8 years old.
 - i. I still have some prints from that first roll of film
 - ii. From the start, I have mostly taken color pictures
 - iii. I’ve never taken a class to take Black and White pictures, but from what I have read and experienced, when shooting in BW it pays to try to SEE in BW, to consider what you see through the viewfinder, and to look for the interplay of shadows, and shapes which get highlighted.
 - c. I took this picture in 2008 at Kirkmont Center, a former Presbyterian Camp in Zanesfield OH



- i. I love the interplay of the leaves and the soil, the dark trunks rising out of the lighter earth.
 - ii. The leaves on the tree on the foreground have detail not visible on the ones on the ground.
 - iii. That large tree demands our attention, and yet it hard to look away from the other trees which may be farther back, but they are still strong and sturdy.
 - iv. I see in this picture the strength of the trees, the peace of the moment, the stark beauty of creation.
- d. But I didn't take this picture in Black and White. I didn't see it in my mind's eye in Black and White.



- e. This is the picture I saw and the shot I took.
 - i. The image changes completely.
 - ii. The colors make us forget some of the shadowy interplay in the previous version.
 - iii. The main event is the burst of fall colors in the tree at the foreground.
 - iv. Suddenly we notice a life-cycle of leaves clinging to the maple, and some which have already fallen, their color an earlier version of the foliage from a week or so before.
 - v. The maple is red, yellow and orange.
 - f. How I would describe this picture to you depends on whether I'm seeing it color or in BW in my mind's eye.
 - g. But the subject of the picture remains the same
2. In today's Gospel passage, in order to describe an aspect of the relationship which God has with humans, Jesus is using very stark language, almost like describing a Black and White photograph: it's a picture in shades of Fear
- a. Jesus is comparing the pressures facing a first century person
 - i. There were structures of power in society which they had to navigate

- ii. The incentives to stay in line and not make waves were often punishment or shaming for stepping out of line with behavior or even ideas
 - iii. And so there was a motivation to avoid being singled out by those in power
 - iv. And the motivation was basically one of fear
 - v. That would have applied both to the Roman occupying government, as well as the religious establishment
 - vi. Additionally, in the previous verses, Jesus was harshly criticized the religious establishment
 - vii. And Jesus was saying to those who followed him: I can tell you fear the authorities and the occupying forces. But I tell you, their ability to hurt you is limited. Yes I suppose they can kill you (!) but there is one who is even above them, God, who has way more power over you.
 - viii. If you're going to try to toe the line, focus on the line which God is drawing. You should fear God and act according to what God commands.
 - b. That's not a very happy picture. It has shades of threat, of power, of dismay. Not a whole lot to make one feel good about it.
 - i. Some of you have experience with congregations which present God in that context, as a power figure to fear if we get out of line.
 - ii. There are churches that seem to preach more about threats of hell than a promise of heaven.
 - iii. Faith seems to be a photograph in shades of fear above trust.
 - c. One complicating factor in the way Jesus was sharing in this passage is that the word fear (in both Hebrew or Greek) was more than just about being afraid.
 - i. It carried with it the sense of being in awe of someone, of being reverent before them
 - ii. Yet that language complexity doesn't quite make it to our English language, and all we notice is fear and the threats that go along with not obeying God
 - d. What I am going to suggest to you is that we should take a new look at this BW picture about fearing of God and see it for the color picture it truly is.
- 3. The main motivation of Jesus in this picture is to highlight God's unending and generous love for us.
 - a. If you're scratching your head, stay with me. See it in color, with bright colorful splashes of the tender love and protective care of the Creator
 - b. Look at the passage from the end first.
 - i. Fear not. Don't be afraid about your wellbeing
 - 1. Remember: God cares for the fragile and vulnerable sparrows.
 - 2. You're way more valuable to God than pretty birds! Don't. Be. Afraid!
 - ii. God will not forget you.
 - 1. God is always thinking of you
 - 2. God knows you completely, even to the number of hairs on your head (God doesn't have to count so high with me anymore!)
 - 3. All this because God loves you
 - iii. Finally, as we come to the start of the passage, there comes a warning

1. If you spend your time disconnected from God, your picture will be out of focus
2. If God's love doesn't make faith rise in your heart, if God's care doesn't make you drop everything to follow God, then you'll get trapped by the threats and intimidation of people in power
3. As Jesus said in the passage right before this: Woe to them for twisting what God meant, and woe to you for falling for their lies
4. When looking at the picture of God's relationship with us, notice the richly colorful and attractive image of God's love in the gospels and in the life of Jesus
 - a. There can be awe and reverence knowing God sees us humans with such tenderness
 - b. There can be loyalty knowing God is invested in our wellbeing
 - c. There can be obedience knowing Jesus courageously showed us how to become a supportive community
 - d. This doesn't have to be a picture about fear and threats, but it can be a picture about a caring God who won't ever forget about us.

The hymn challenged us "Why should I feel discouraged?" but it doesn't erase the reality of discouragement. It just refocuses the picture and asks to see it in color. The hymn promises that Jesus does not forget us, because just like with the sparrow, Jesus cares for and "watches me."