

Only One Earth

WORLD ENVIRONMENT
DAY 2022



Prayer reflection card: Watching sparrows

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care” (Matthew 10:29, NIV).

Scripture is full of animals.

Shepherds have their sheep and soldiers have their horses. Bears and wolves are a danger, and eagles and lions an inspiration.

But most of us reading these Scriptures today will never own a sheep, or ride a horse, or have to flee a bear. (Okay, that last one isn’t a bad thing.) For most of us, the animals of Scripture can seem strange and exotic and difficult to connect with.

But then we find Matthew 10:29-31, where Jesus teaches his disciples using the humble sparrow.

This is good news for us because sparrows thrive, well, almost everywhere! From sleepy rural streets to the noisiest of cities, we can expect to see these tiny fearless grey-brown birds hopping about every day.

Take this opportunity to memorise Jesus’ words in Matthew 10:31, “Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

Next time you see a sparrow (or another small bird) let yourself be reminded of Jesus’ words in that verse. Take it as an opportunity to pray, to be challenged by the mission to which Jesus has called us, and to be comforted by God’s care for you.

Don’t be afraid – you are worth more than many sparrows!

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Prayer reflection card: No longer a slave

“... No longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother ...”
(Philemon 1:16, NIV).

In the middle of the New Testament we find a very small book called Philemon. Here Paul writes to Philemon, urging him to welcome back “his” slave who had run away. And it wasn’t enough for Philemon to take back this slave – he now had to treat that man as “a dear brother”!

The Roman world, it seemed, was built on slavery. Everyday economic, cultural, legal, political and social pressures combined to ensure that slaves knew their place and that no one questioned the system. Well ... no one except for Paul!

Paul, then, pulls out all the stops to convince Philemon to transform a slave into family. He assures him he is surrounded by prayer (v4), reminds Philemon of the high standard he’s called to (v7), and he even resorts to what looks suspiciously like guilt-tripping (v12)!

Strangely enough, we find ourselves in a similar position today when we consider sustainability. Just like Philemon, we are being urged to think

about something we once took for granted – and to look at it in a new and radical way. Just like Philemon, we find that this new way of thinking can be really hard work. No wonder Paul had to remind Philemon of all the great challenges he had already overcome (v5)!

Creator God, thank you for the world you have made!

We do not want take to take your world for granted, or mistreat it.

But then, like Philemon, when we look at things in a new way, we find ourselves having to count the cost – in time, in money, in effort, in ‘head space’, in social pressures.

We acknowledge these forces that can make it so easy to blend in, and so hard to do what is right.

We pray for wisdom and courage as we learn to look after our world.

In the name of Jesus, who brings transformation and healing, we pray, Amen.

PRAYER STATIONS



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Prayer reflection card: The swallow's nest

"Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young – a place near your altar, Lord Almighty, my King and my God" (Psalm 84:3, NIV).

I recently took up bird photography as a hobby. I've learnt that some birds are very easy to photograph. Magpies are easy to spot and quite unafraid of humans. Crested pigeons are incredibly common. And cockatoos seem to love putting on a show for anyone watching.

And then there are swallows. They are terrible to photograph because they almost never stop moving! It's nearly impossible to get a shot of a swallow that isn't completely blurry. It seems that every minute of the day, the swallows are on the move.

And yet, what does the Psalmist say about swallows in Psalm 84? That in the presence of God, even the hyperactive swallow finds a nest – somewhere to rest! It also notes that even the most common of birds, the sparrow, is welcomed by God.

This is good news for us, beyond the immediate message of that verse. When we think about sustainability, we often think of 'saving the planet', and we are soon overwhelmed by the scope of what lies ahead. But the Psalmist and his eye for

the commonest birds in his city reminds us that we don't have to save the planet – just our own corner of it. We may not be able to 'save the whales', but we can clean up litter on our local beach or plant bird-friendly native shrubs in our front yard!

Similarly, Jesus sums up the awe-inspiring majesty of his ethical teachings with the command to love our neighbours. This is comforting – because we can start right away – but challenging, because you can immediately tell if you're not actually doing it!

Creator God, thank you for your world.

Thank you for entrusting us with our own small corners of it.

Help us learn to love our own local streets, gardens, beaches, yards, parks and roads.

Help us learn to keep an eye out for the common things – the sparrows, the skinks, the butterflies and magpies – and see them with fresh eyes.

Thank you, God, that the Psalmists' delight and joy can be ours!

Amen.