

St. Francis, who we're remembering today, loved preaching to the birds as we've heard. I want to think about birds today and the eagle-eyed people amongst you might notice that even the flower guild got the sense today we were thinking about birds. There are some birds behind the high altar. St. Francis liked to get close to the birds. I once heard of a man in England who also tried to get close to the birds. His dream was to walk through the woods and to have birds come and land on him as he walked. He made a special hat. He got a long tube with little pedestals coming off it, filled it with birdseed, and strapped it to his head. He went out into the woods.

He didn't get very far till a large gray squirrel saw the birdseed, jumped at the pedestal, cricked his neck, and he ended up in hospital. We shouldn't laugh really, but it is quite funny. Thankfully St. Francis didn't make such a hat. He seemed to have a much more natural relationship with the birds. He spoke to them because St. Francis realized, as we've heard in our readings, that birds can teach us. In our reading from Matthew, Jesus encouraged his disciples by saying, "Look at the birds of the air." I want to do just that now and show you four pictures of different types of birds.

This is the first one. *[holds up picture]* You might not be able to see it in the back, so people in the front might need to tell me what kind of bird am I showing here. An ostrich, very good. I did wonder, actually I thought, it's not really a bird of the air, the ostrich, because it doesn't even fly. Do you know that ostriches are mentioned in the Bible, so are over 30 types of bird? That's nothing compared to the 10,000 different types of bird that there are in the world. They're all amazing. Ostriches are incredible. They can't fly, but do you know how fast an ostrich can run? 43 miles per hour. I love watching them run, because then run backwards. Have you ever seen that? Their knees are jointed the other way to ours. It's an amazing bird. Sadly, I don't have ostriches in my garden, but I do have hummingbirds.

I never, ever, ever tire of seeing those magnificent little birds feed on the flowers in our garden. The one thing that birds can teach us is that the God who made the world, all the creatures and the birds in it, is an amazingly imaginative kind of God. God made a world with ostriches and hummingbirds and toucans and parrots, a world full of variety, color and splendor. Our God made a world which is finely tuned and balanced, and as I say full of color and beauty. This week's Sea Breeze, it's a collector's edition, because I've put in the back, well Walter has kindly produced this, just a whole range of the types of color and birds that you get. There's a little quiz that afterwards you could take it home. I want to know if anybody apart from Nan Thomas can identify all the birds that are shown here. The amazing variety that there is in creation.

I've got another bird to show you. What is this? *[holds up picture]* Jack? It's a cardinal. A cardinal makes a beautiful sound. It's one of the songbirds that God made. Do you know a cardinal can sing more notes on the piano, it can go through all of the keys on the piano in less than a second? Some birds can sing two notes at one time. I'm not sure why birds sing. If anyone can tell me, let me know afterwards. One reason that birds might sing is because they're happy. Jesus says, "Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." One lesson we can learn from the birds is not to worry, not to waste our time about things that don't really matter. Birds don't worry because God loves them and cares for them, as he cares for all his creation.

What's this? *[holds up picture]* Oh, I've noticed all the brains, all the ornithologists seem to be sitting on this side of the church today. Does anybody on this side know what it is? The choir? Yes, I'll give the choir a chance. A sparrow. Sparrows are mentioned in the Bible too. Jesus says this, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. Even the hairs of your head are all counted, so do not be afraid. You are of more value than many

sparrows." The God who made the hummingbird in all its detail made us.

The Psalmist says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, that the God who cares for his creation cares above all for us. God loves all that he has made. The whole Christian gospel is inspired, it begins with that notion of divine love. God came in Jesus Christ because he loved us and wanted to win us back to him.

One last picture. *[holds up picture]* What is it? A hen. Very good, it's a hen with some chicks. It's an image of the hen protecting her baby chicks. Do you know ... Good. Jesus talked about a hen as well. He says this. This is in Matthew's gospel as well. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings?" That's an amazing image. How many of us, when we think of God, picture an image like this, of a hen gathering her children? That's the image that Jesus conjures up. That's what Jesus encourages us to think of God. We have a God who loves us and cares for us as a hen cares for his baby chicks, for her baby chicks, as she gathers them under her wing. That's how we're to think of God looking after us, his creatures.

Yes, the birds have a lot to teach us. They teach us about God's amazing creativity. They show us about living a worry-free life, and they teach us how much God loves us, just as the song says that Walter will now sing.

[Walter DuMelle singing]
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.