

Sermon – Trinity 17A – Creation Sunday

Content: To introduce creation tide and why the church celebrates it. To relate this to St Francis and what he taught us all those years ago. To quote a passage from a book written on St Francis. To ask – how did it make you feel? To think about how our lifestyles affect the earth and those around us. To encourage people to relate back to creation. To end with a prayer and the opening question.

Intention: To challenge us to take on board the actions of St Francis and become more aware of creation around us.

Outcome: To change one thing in our lives to help creation ‘breathe’ again.

For the last 5 weeks the church has been in a season of Creationtide.

A time dedicated to God as Creator and Sustainer of all life. And today marks the end of the season.

It is a day which commemorates the life of a 12th century monk who cared deeply about creation.

Today, is also the feast of St Francis, the patron saint of ecology and animals. Some churches today will “Bless the Animals,” recognising God’s care for the creatures that live among us.

But what relevance can the message of a saint who lived eight centuries ago have for us here today?

We are all living in strange and worrying times. COVID-19 has become part of our world, and lives. It has had, and is continuing to have, a devastating effect. Hundreds of thousands have lost their lives. The economy has crashed, leaving many countries with mounting debts. Many are left without work. The effects of climate change are being seen throughout the world. Melting icebergs, floods, droughts, beautiful creatures becoming extinct.

What can we learn from the life and words of St Francis?

At the time when Francis lived, the world was full of inequality. Many starved and many were wealthy. It was also a world of violence. And a world of ecological destruction.

Francis was brought up in the family of a wealthy merchant. He was spoilt. Had fine clothes. Much food. However, by the time he left school at 14, he had become a rebellious teenager, drinking, partying and breaking the city's curfew. The Church, the upper classes and the merchant classes were all competing for wealth and power. All of which came, at the expense of the poor. Italy comprised of competing states, constantly at war. And when Francis was 19, he went to battle against the nearby town of Perugia. He was captured and held hostage for a year before his father paid the ransom for his freedom.

Francis' conversion experience happened in a church at San Damiano. It was whilst standing before a crucifix, that Francis renounced all his possessions. Stripping himself of his wealthy

possessions and clothes in a public square, in his hometown of Assisi.

For the rest of his life, Francis and his followers, longed, prayed and worked for a life of simplicity. A lifestyle without luxury or privileges. Francis saw that many poor people without these things, seemed to live happier and more fulfilling lives than the ambitious and rich.

It was a life which was shaped by love.

A life where Francis' heart and mind were opened to the possibility of recovering hope, peace, and joy.

Of course, in today's world, poverty is not usually a matter of happy simplicity. There are many issues; - a poor diet, houses overcrowded, homelessness, unemployment.

Yet, the followers of Francis today have a simple message that those who are better off should **'live more simply, so that others can simply live.'**

Francis also came face to face with Creation. He experienced the presence of God in nature.

He preached to the birds and lived with the animals.

He wanted all creatures on Earth, including humans, to be treated as equals under God.

Thomas of Celano, who was a member of Francis' religious order who knew him personally, wrote one of the earliest books about St Francis.

As I read what he wrote try to picture the scene in your minds...

“One time as Francis was passing through the Spoleto valley, he came upon a place near Bevagna, in which a great multitude of birds of various kinds had assembled.

When the holy one of God saw them, because of the outstanding love of the Creator with which he loved all creatures, he ran swiftly to the place.

He greeted them in his usual way, as if they shared in reason. As the birds did not take flight, he went to them, going to and from among them, touching their heads and bodies with his tunic.”

“Meanwhile his joy and wonder increased as he carefully admonished them to listen to the Word of God:

‘My brother birds, you should greatly praise your Creator and love Him always. He clothed you with feathers and gave you wings for flying.

Among all His creatures He made you free and gave you the purity of the air. You neither sow nor reap, He nevertheless governs you without your least care.”

“At these words, the birds gestured a great deal, in their own way. They stretched their necks, spread their wings, opened their beaks and looked at him. They did not leave the place until, having made the sign of the cross, Francis blessed them and gave them permission. “

I wonder how this made you feel.

The words and actions of St Francis words should set us a **challenge**.

A **challenge** of ecological conversion.

A **challenge** where there is a transformation of heart and mind, restoring our relationships with each other, with creation and with God.

Francis' service to the poor and his love of nature, are in many ways the same thing today.

Climate change impacts everyone but no one more than the poor and marginalised, who often cannot afford to deal with the costs of relocation or ecological disaster.

Here in 2020, we understand more now of what our lifestyles are doing to the earth, and one another:

We are beginning to understand what needs to be done. Small actions, which collectively become large.

And the challenge is down to us to **SHOW** what needs to be done, to lessen the damage we have already caused.

This planet, **earth**, God has trusted us to steward.

So, perhaps this week we can make time to prayerfully consider what we can do. Both individually and as a church community.

To look at our habits.

To look at the world.

To long for the day where we will see the whole earth renewed and restored.

Where healing will be brought to all – even to all of creation.

It was over 800 years ago that Saint Francis held together the well-being of all humankind and a thriving earth.

“We cannot serve the poor without also caring for creation.”

Francis’ plea was us to awaken us to the cry of the earth.

To help us on our way,

I am going to finish with an extract from

“Just Walk to Jerusalem Prayer, by Chris Amos of the Amos Trust.

“Walk softly upon the earth.

May its beauty surround you.

May its wisdom delight you.

Its music invite you.

May you love and be loved,

May you know peace and practice compassion.

Rejoice in the earth and in all of creation.”

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