

Sunday, October 3, 2010

Luke 17:5-10

Entrusted into Our Care

Tomorrow, October 4th is the Day of St. Francis, patron saint of animals and the planet. One of the ways that we remember Francis is in the blessing of the animals. It is important for us to remember that God has raised up and continues to raise up men and women who serve as models of the Christian life. Francis was born in Assisi in present day Italy in 1181 AD. When he was twenty-five years old he had a vision where Christ called him to repair his Church. He dedicated his life to the care of Christ's Church, the care of the sick, the poor, lepers and the birds and animals of God's creation. Francis said that God cared deeply about the whole of creation, the earth included. This is why on the Day of St. Francis we ask for God's blessing on our pets and all of God's creatures that have been entrusted into our care.

When I look at Francis I see a man who received a very clear vision of God's calling and dedicated his life to that vision. Francis serves not only as a very powerful example for me, but also for Trinity Lutheran Church. We have been called by God to this place to minister to this community. We have to have a very clear as to the vision of who we are called to be and what our central purpose is. I believe that our purpose is to proclaim the Gospel of God. Mark says in his Gospel, the first chapter, verse 14, "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God." Jesus was very clear about his purpose. God's Kingdom is here and now, God is present. We need to open our eyes, hearts and minds and believe in the gospel. The gospel is not what we believe about Jesus, it is the central message of Jesus. The gospel is proclaimed in the life, teachings and actions of Jesus. As St. Francis said, "Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words."

The gospel is not some fuzzy intellectual concept. When we look at the life, teachings and actions of Jesus we see that the gospel is very clear. Every person, no matter who they are or what their situation, is loved, valued and accepted by God. The problem that we encounter is not that God does not care deeply about us, God does. It is that we have turned away, closed our eyes, hearts and minds to God's loving presence. Love for Jesus is not the fluffy, sentimental word that we have made it today. To love is to treat another with dignity and respect. Love, for Jesus, applies to the sick, the poor, the outcast, and even to one's enemies. More than that, we see that Jesus came proclaiming the gospel of God. God is not just the God of all human beings; God is the one who has given life to the universe. The whole of the universe is in God's care. We are called upon to treat everything of this creation with dignity and respect. Francis brought that to the attention of the people of his time. We are called upon to do the same.

This is God's Creation. God has created heaven and earth, all that is, seen and unseen. We remind ourselves of that each Sunday morning. We say it, but do we really believe it? We do not hold title to any part of creation, God does. God has created us and graciously allowed us to live on the wondrous planet. In response we need to take care of it, to leave it better than we found it. There is an African proverb, "Treat the Earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It was lent to you by your children." Somewhere we have gotten the idea that the earth is ours to do with as we please. We extract our wealth and then throw away the remnants like an empty packaging container. What if the wealth shared with us is the earth itself?

God cares about the whole of creation. One of the images of God that we have managed to hang on to is that of God as humanoid, a really big, powerful humanoid, but humanoid. Fortunately, we have started to move beyond the white, male model. If God created the universe out of nothing, God is beyond everything we can comprehend. We have no concept that we can use to describe God. The Hebrew speaks of God as a verb, not a noun. God was revealed to us in Jesus Christ not in terms of appearance, but in terms of God's deep compassion and desire for justice for the whole of creation. God's love is not limited to humans. All of the earth and its creatures must be treated with dignity and respect. The earth does not revolve around human beings – it is centered in God.

Life is a gift of God. I happen to believe that the whole of the earth and the universe itself is alive. God created it and cares deeply about it. The Bible reveals a deep sense of the sacredness of life. Life is not a commodity to be bought and sold, or the object of our sport. We are dependent on life for our survival. Life provides our shelter and our food. We must be constantly aware of the sacred gift that has been given to us and treat it with great respect.

We are one with the earth. The second chapter of Genesis tells how God formed the human from the "dust of the ground". We are one with the earth. It is breath, the spirit of God that gives us life. I find it interesting that Christians are willing to fight to the death to proclaim that this is God's earth and then live as if God has no concern for it. The earth is our home. We are not strangers or aliens. It is God's creation – all of it. We say God created the earth and the heavens. We are a part of the creation no matter where we hang out and we need to take good care of it.

Creation is coming into being. We seem to function with the idea that Creation is a past event. Creation is living and dynamic reality. God is each day bringing creation into being. We have ever new possibilities of life and relationship in the wonder of God's unfolding reality. The pervasive view of the universe is very mechanistic. This idea sees the universe is one great chunk of dead stuff, a massive machine driven by universal physical laws. What if the universe is alive, functioning on the basis of biological, relational and spiritual laws also? What would be our attitude toward the care of our home?

All Creation participates in the ongoing creation. We are not simply biding our time here until something better comes along. We all share in the ongoing process. God is here, present and active in bringing creation into being. All of us, from the lowest virus, to we humans and the stars themselves participate in creation. We can make the earth a richer, more beautiful place to live for us and all creatures, or we can participate in the destruction of our earthly home and all its people and creatures. We have been given a choice. We can be open to the presence and way of God and participate with God in building up of creation, or we can turn our back on God and carve out our own piece of ugliness. So far, we have done a pretty good job of the latter. We can destroy ourselves as a species. God and God's creation will continue to unfold without us. The earth does not revolve around human beings - it is centered in God.

God has called each one of us and gifted us with special talents and abilities that we might share in the ongoing work of creation. Each one of us is vital to the work of the Creator. We are the teachers, the nurses, doctors, homemakers, plumbers, electricians and farmers, all who participate in building up and caring for the world. We do this by showing respect and dignity for one another, for our world and all its creatures. This is gospel. This is our duty.
Amen.

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