

St. Francis of Assisi Day

Sept. 4, 2020

Genesis 1-2:2

Psalm 104

Job 12:7-10a

Luke 12:22-32

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

OK – so I know we are heavy on the readings today, so I’ll go light on the sermon.

Today is St. Francis of Assisi Day. It rarely falls on a Sunday, so I’m really excited that we can celebrate the day together during regular worship, and being on zoom is actually really handy, because all of our animals can join us. Yay!

So, you have perhaps heard me talk about the Season of Creation. We’ve been celebrating it during Wednesday morning worship throughout September. The Season started on September 1st, which is Pray for Creation Day, and it ends today with St. Francis Day.

The Season of Creation was started by the Orthodox Church in 1989, it was then picked up by the World Council of Churches in 2007, the Roman Catholic Church in 2016, and then the ELCA and Episcopal Church just a couple of years ago.

Within the Church, concern for the environment is growing and growing. For too long, we have been abusing the planet and now we’re coming to a time of reckoning. No matter how you might feel about climate change, I think we can all agree that the planet has taken about as much abuse as it can handle.

So, this year’s theme for the Season of Creation is – Jubilee for the Earth. Jubilee is a concept found in the Old Testament. When Moses received the commandments from God on Mt. Sinai, they included jubilee years – they were the Sabbath years.

Every 7 years, the Earth was allowed to rest. Nothing was planted. Nothing was harvested. The Earth was set free to rejuvenate for that entire year. Then on the jubilee of jubilee years – 7x7 – the 49th year – everything was to return to where it started. So, if you borrowed your neighbor’s lawn mower and hadn’t returned it yet, on the big jubilee year you had to make sure it was returned to your neighbor. On that year, all slaves were set free as well. It was a big reset year.

Because of the 50th anniversary of Earth Day and Covid-19, this year's organizers decided to focus on jubilee for the Earth. What a lot of us realized while we were locked up at the beginning of Covid, was that when people stopped doing things, the Earth recovered – water ways became clearer, the air became clearer, animals returned to places where humans had chased them out.

We had all forgotten that the Earth needs to rest just as much as God needed to rest on the 7th day. God knew we needed to rest, so the gift of Sabbath was given to us, but it was also given to us so that the rest of creation could rest as well.

This year the Season of Creation is reminding us all that we need to rest. For all of creation's sake, we need to rest.

So, let's go back to the very beginning, a very good place to start, and let's take a look at the order of creation: light; sky; Land and Seas; vegetation; the moon, sun and stars. Then on the fifth day, God created swarms of living creatures, fish and all sea animals, birds and other winged creatures. On the 5th day God created the animals of the Sea and Sky.

Then, on the 6th day, God created all of the Land animals, including, at the very end, human kind. At the very end God created humans. We're the last ones to show up, and yet, we think we're the most important animal. Perhaps that "image of God" statement has gone to our head, in the wrong way.

If we study the scriptures and what God does, we'll realize that God is loving and merciful, that God creates life, and doesn't destroy it. Just look to the cross. We killed Jesus, but God brought him back to life. God is all about abundant life – for all of creation.

So, how did we end up being those who destroy instead of those who create? How did we become agents of death instead of life?

When God said, "have dominion," God meant be good stewards of the Earth. God said, "I've given you all of this good stuff so that you can live. So, live and be like me in helping everything else to live too."

But, we forget. We forget a lot, because we get confused. We think we have to bank it all now so that we can have it tomorrow, but Jesus tells us to stop worrying. Stop worrying. Our worrying is what is killing creation.

God knows that we need homes, clothing, and food. And, just as God provides for the other animals, so God will provide for us as well.

God is loving and caring and gives us everything we need, so it's ok to stop and take a Sabbath. It's ok to rest. Actually, it's more than ok to rest. It's desperately needed – for us and for creation.

Job was all worked up because he had worked so hard and then everything went to pot. Job was busy working and then he was forced in to a Sabbath, kind of like us.

Job didn't understand that being forced into resting was actually a gift, so when Job questions God about how God could let horrible things happen to him when he had been working so hard, God points Job to the rest of creation. Look to creation and you will understand that God is caring for all of creation, including us.

I learned something on Thursday that I didn't know, or I had forgotten. Did you know that in Latin, *animus*, animal, means having a soul? If anyone ever tells you animals don't go to heaven because they don't have a soul, ask them why in Latin *animal* means one with a soul.

St. Francis understood that animals have souls, so he preached God's love to them. He also knew that they are our elders. They were created before we were. They've been on this planet longer than we have, so they have things they can teach us. They're not stupid, but guides. Those who live on the land know this, especially indigenous peoples.

St. Francis was a wealthy man who gave up everything so that he could live Luke 12, so that he could live dependent on God. What he learned in shedding all of his material wealth was that he no longer had fear, because he no longer had worry about his stuff. That freed him to live as Christ in the world – to be merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

And I know, you're thinking, "He's a saint; he can do those things." But, in the Lutheran understanding, you're also a saint. All the baptized are saints, yes – sinners too - but saints through the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit who was working in St. Francis is working in us as well, willing us to let God be God, and to find our rest in God.

Sabbath is a gift. Rest is a gift, because it reminds us that God is in control. This is our Father's World, and we are a part of that world, not over and above it. God is caring for us, and all of creation as well.

So, take a break – for everyone's sake.

Thanks be to God. Amen.