

INSTRUMENTS OF YOUR PEACE

10/4/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA (*Livestreamed*)

Feast of St. Francis: Genesis 1:20-25; Psalm 121; ~~Galatians 6:14-18~~; Matthew 11:25-30

Last year, I participated in a 10-day pilgrimage, walking in the footsteps of Saints Clare and Francis in Assisi, Italy. One day we took a long bus ride up to the top of Mount Penna in Tuscany to a Franciscan monastery called La Verna. It's a beautiful site featuring a large cathedral-like building, with a series of worship spaces along an outdoor corridor, leading to the little chapel where St. Francis purportedly experienced his stigmata.

Every afternoon, the Franciscan brothers lead a procession from the main church to the chapel, and they've done so for over 600 years. Because the monastery is located at the top of a mountain, you can imagine how much snow they get in the winter! But in all those years, there was only one day in which the brothers weren't able to process because of too much snow.

Legend has it, however, that, the next morning, animal tracks were found leading from the church to the chapel. Of course, part of this legend has to do with the connection Francis had with animals. But as I've been reading the book, *The Universal Christ*, I'm realizing that connection was trying to exemplify more than just the idea that Francis could communicate with animals.

The author, Richard Rohr, who is a good Franciscan himself, talks about Christ existing in all living things, and bases that on the idea that the first incarnation of God into this world wasn't through Jesus, but through the creation of earth and all living beings, as described for us in this morning's reading from Genesis. Rohr's argument is that creation itself was God's first endeavor to be in the world, and that if God created it, and claimed its goodness, then God is within all of creation.

So, the animals weren't listening to Francis as much as Francis was recognizing God within them. This commitment of Francis to see Christ within everyone and everything is what led him to also be known as a peacemaker. He wasn't seen as a peace activist, in that he was constantly rallying for peace; rather, he was committed to living everyday life in a way that demonstrated the bit of scripture that says: "There is no longer Jew or Greek...slave or free...[nor] male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28).

If you remember the story of Francis, you'll recall he was born to a very privileged family, but, at some point, renounced their wealth. Francis stood in the town square and literally stripped himself of all of his clothes. He did so, proclaiming he would not even wear clothing his father had paid for, thereby, freeing himself of the family's societal obligations.

As part of his public gesture, Francis committed himself fully to God. So, as he stripped away wealth and rules, he also symbolically stripped himself of any barriers impeding his deeper relationship with God.

That's what stands out most for me whenever I contemplate the life of St. Francis—the simplicity of it. Although his followers tried to develop a whole set of rules, Francis consistently insisted Jesus had offered the only rule we need: to love God with all our heart, mind and soul, and to love our neighbors—including all living beings—as ourselves.

Embedded in the teachings of Francis is also the reminder that our faith journeys require times of renewal, to prepare ourselves to be the simple peace makers we're called to be in our daily lives. Likewise, our Gospel message describes the power of our connection—of being yoked together with Christ—and how we'll find rest for our souls in that yoking, for Christ's yoke is easy, and the burden made light.

As a way to honor Francis, and to deepen our commitment to being simple peacemakers in our daily lives, let's pray together, now, the Prayer attributed to St. Francis as found in your bulletin.

Lord, make us an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

—Amen

Collect of the day

Most high, omnipotent, good Lord, grant your people grace to renounce gladly the vanities of this world; that, following the way of blessed Francis, we may for love of you delight in your whole creation with perfectness of joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Genesis 1:20-25

²⁰And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." ²¹So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." ²³And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Psalm 121

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills; *
from where is my help to come?
2 My help comes from the Lord, *
the maker of heaven and earth.
3 He will not let your foot be moved *

and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.

4 Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel *
shall neither slumber nor sleep;

5 The Lord himself watches over you; *
the Lord is your shade at your right hand,

6 So that the sun shall not strike you by day, *
nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; *
it is he who shall keep you safe.

8 The Lord shall watch over your going out and
your coming in, *
from this time forth for evermore.

Galatians 6:14-18

¹⁴May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! ¹⁶As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. ¹⁷From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body. ¹⁸May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

Matthew 11:25-30

²⁵At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."