

Sermon preached by Rev Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

St Francis' Day

Sunday 2 October 2022

Praised be to you my Lord: Look at the birds of the air, consider the lilies in the fields.

What do you love about your pets?

What do I love about Eleanor?

I missed her when we were away and I was so pleased to pick her up from her holiday home and hear her meowing and talking to us all the way home.

There was then the important task of catching up with pats and face rubs as she purred.

There is something special about the relationship between an animal and a human, whether it be a cat or dog, a guinea pig or magpie.

It reminds us that we are connected with other beings, we belong together and our lives are enriched by our relationship with other creatures and indeed creation.

Our spirits are lifted and our souls nourished as we stare out to sea, or contemplate a beautiful spring flower or blossoming tree.

When we are away from creation and creatures our spirits are affected. We were created by God to be in relationship with the rest of creation and with God.

In love God created the world, the sea and the air, the sun, the stars and skies and all creatures as well as human beings.

It is a gift in love from a creating God, who reminds us that we belong together, that we experience God being with us through the work of God's hands, God's world and God's creatures.

We are each enriched by our relationship with the created order and the bible is full of praise of God and the close relationship between God and God's creation.

Jesus' words in the gospel today remind us to notice and be aware of God's creation, that this helps us to get things in perspective.

Jesus reminds his followers and the crowd 'do not worry about your life, what you will eat and what you will wear' that life is of more value than what is purely material.

When says do not worry he is inviting people to lift their gaze to 'look at the birds of the air... to consider the lilies of the field'.

As God has given good things in creation so also God will provide and care for us.

As God has given beauty to the flowers of the field, like the golden fields of canola or the beauty of a rhododendron bush how much more will God clothe us.

St Francis was the original ecologist. He called fellow creatures his brother and sister. The canticle of the creatures which he wrote starts Praise be to you my Lord with all your creatures.

St Francis gazed at creation and saw the work of God and was moved to praise. He saw a close relationship between us and God and creation, that creation is a gift.

Pope Francis quotes these words to begin his letter 'Laudato Si' on care for our common home.

He says 'Praise be to you O Lord. In the words of the beautiful canticle St Francis reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us'.¹

Pope Francis urges us to see that the ecological crisis summons us to an interior conversion, to renew our relationships with God, one another and the created world.

The created world is God's gift to us to care for and protect and that our care of creation and those who are poor are also interconnected.

Care for creation and one another includes understanding that everything is connected.

We are one human family and have a shared responsibility for others and for all creation. He talks about the harm we have done to the environment and challenges us to see that this is the time to act, to make changes in how we live and change our habits of constant consumption.

Pope Francis illustrates through scripture and through the Christian Church how God is the creator who is revealed through God's creation and that we are part of it and have an important role to be stewards of it, to care for it.

The communion meal in which we feed on Christ shapes our awareness of how God comes to us through the material world. The sabbath day of rest invites us to reclaim a sense of rest and celebration to renew our relationship with our neighbour with creation and with God.

¹ Pope Francis *Laudato Si* p.1

When we bring our animals to be blessed today we are naming God's presence in them and in us.

To be blessed is to name that God is within them, that God's love is in them and in us.

We are saying with Francis praise be to you O Lord for all your creatures.

We are thanking God for the gift that they are to us and the way they enrich our lives.

We are also giving thanks for all of God's creation and that we are part of God's creation and are called to care for it.

Praise be to you O Lord for all your creatures, for our dogs and cats, ferrets and guinea pigs, rabbits and chickens, horses and alpacas, koalas and kangaroos for all your creatures.

May they be blessed and may we be a blessing to them as we treasure the gift of God's creation.

*Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.*

*Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.*

*Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.*

*God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.*

*Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good,
advance the weak, and care for this world in
which we live.*

*The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.*

*Lections:
Genesis 1.26-31
Psalm 148.7-14
Matthew 6.25-34*