

Sunday 12 October 2025

St Francis of Assisi
Pet Blessing at 9.30am

St David's Chelmer,
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Sermon Notes

Word Count: 1,220

Our focus today is on God's goodness and creativity, acknowledging all that we appreciate in the world. We could add the stars too, and say, the whole universe. It's quite a lot – uncountable trillion grains of sand, trillions of creatures from plankton to elephants, and trillions of far-flung galaxies barely explored by telescopes. What's a trillion, here and there!

In our prayers and songs and the words we use at communion, we acknowledge this broadly every time we gather. But we're also giving special focus to the legacy of someone called Francis – or Francisco in his language.

He was born in 1181 in Assisi in the land now called Italy, with the name Giovanni di Pietro di Bernadone. Francis was the name he later adopted.

There are lots of things about him that are well established in history. There are also stories about him that may or may not be true. Some of them involve him preaching to birds and animals too, but one story goes too far, saying that even wolves listened to him and then repented of their violent ways.

But there's more than enough truth for us to honour his life without resorting to magical stories. Quite possibly he DID speak to animals; some of us speak to our pets, we talk to birds – people in my family talk every morning to magpies with their distinctive talkative sounds and it is certain that they recognise different human faces and voices.

We would like to understand that God takes delight in creation, including animals and birds. Well... most of them, even if we'd like to draw the line at mosquitos and spiders – LOL.

There's no shortage of stories about saints and animals. Intuitively, it seems as if spiritual maturity leads also to having a deep affinity with the creation.

When we reflect on how we are at our best, and imagine how we wish we could be, our imagination takes us into the realm of connection with animals and all of creation.

The world has been grieving the recent loss of Jane Goodall. Her life's work with gorillas in the mist of East Africa, and her encouragement to protect our planet, taught the world something important about how to be human.

Francis trained to be a silk merchant like his wealthy father, and lived the way rich, entitled young men have tended to live in any generation. But through experiences of hardship including a year as a prisoner of war and a serious illness, he began to have spiritual visions that caused him to change his way of living.

He began to lament his way of life, and his tendency to use other people for his own pleasure. Lament is a pouring out of sadness, even anger, in the knowledge that God doesn't want us to pretend everything is wonderful when it isn't, but rather wants our honest response to difficult things.

If God was going to speak to someone who is lamenting their sinfulness, I wonder what you might expect God to say. Perhaps something like:

"It's OK, you are forgiven because Jesus carried all your sins on the cross"?

Or maybe, "Yes you really are bad, even worse than you realise."

But instead Francis began to hear God say to him, "Repair my Church, which is falling into ruins."

When God speaks it is often something completely unexpected that brings a new perspective that the person is unlikely to have decided on their own.

"Repair my Church, which is falling into ruins." These words redirected Francis from negative wallowing to positive action. They redirected him to community and from obsession with personal sin to dealing with corruption and decay in his whole Christian community.

Francis didn't understand everything at first. He thought the call to repair the church was literal, and when he saw a church building in desperate need of repair, he thought he was obeying God by taking money from his father's business to pay for the repairs.

His father was not amused! Later, Francis renounced his inheritance and gave up his place in the family business.

Through Francis, God was calling the whole church to repent of its addiction to wealth and power.

Francis is remembered for his profound love of the poor. In a time when wealth and power often defined a person's worth, Francis recognised Christ in those who were forgotten and overlooked.

He embraced a life of simplicity in order to be a brother to people on the margins of society. In a short space of time, many joined him.

They wore a traditional "habit" – a flowing robe – usually brown in colour. You may not know any Franciscans, but there are communities of them all over the world, and in our Brisbane Anglican Diocese, there are 2 priests who are also Franciscan brothers.

There's a wonderful story told of Francis going to Rome to seek the blessing and encouragement of the Pope for the growing group of men. They were awed by the excessive wealth they saw in the church, but when told they had to put on "decent clothing" in order to approach the Pope, they refused – this is who we are, they said.

The encounter with the Pope and senior people in the church hierarchy at the time was profound, and in time it brought about considerable changes with the Pope's full blessing and encouragement.

If Francis and his men had been awed by the obvious glitter of Roman wealth, it was the Pope who was awed by the obvious holiness and vocational dedication of Francis and those he brought with him.

In their embrace of simplicity of life, they redirected attention toward those things that cannot be bought and therefore cannot be taken away.

"Every human being has the vocation to love," Francis taught. And in serving the poor, Francis saw himself as serving Christ directly, echoing the Gospel words: "Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me."

There was recognition of the dignity of every person, especially the vulnerable, and that holiness is found not necessarily in grand gestures, but in small acts of love, lived faithfully each day.

His life became a living sermon, drawing countless people back to faith. Francis saw God's beauty reflected in all of creation. The world was not something to be used and discarded, but a gift to be cherished and respected.

His famous "Canticle of the Sun" or "prayerful song of the Sun" praises Brother Sun, Sister Moon and all living creatures as signs pointing to the Creator, and it refers to things that money cannot buy, and which poverty cannot take away.

And this leads us to something that is true of our animal companions.

Our pets don't care what we wear or how educated we are or how prestigious our occupation is. They don't compare us with others, and regard us as though we are the best human companion any animal could ever want. They don't bother about where we ask them to live, as long as we are with them. They help us see the value of that which cannot be earned but can only be received with gratitude.

Our animal companions are gifts of grace to us. They are a daily blessing. So today we ask God to bless them.

PRAYER OF ST FRANCIS – said in place of The Creed this day.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
 where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 where there is injury, pardon;
 where there is doubt, faith;
 where there is despair, hope;
 where there is darkness, light;
 where there is sadness, joy.
 O divine Master, grant that I 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.

The Collect

Lord God,
 you have made heaven and earth and all that is good:
 help us to delight in the simple things
 and to rejoice always in the richness of your bounty;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord,
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Psalm 95. 1-7

Said in place of The Gloria

- ¹ O come, let us sing to the Lord;
 let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
- ² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
 let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
- ³ For the Lord is a great God
 and a great King above all gods.
- ⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth;
 the heights of the mountains are his also.
- ⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
 and the dry land, which his hands have formed.
- ⁶ Come, let us worship and bow down;
 let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
- ⁷ For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture
 and the sheep of his hand.
 O that today you would listen to his voice!

Reading: Psalm 8

Divine Majesty and Human Dignity

- ¹ O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
 You have set your glory above the heavens.
- ² Out of the mouths of babes and infants
 you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
 to silence the enemy and the avenger.
- ³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars that you have established;
- ⁴ what are humans that you are mindful of them,
 mortals, that you care for them?

- ⁵ Yet you have made them a little lower than God
and crowned them with glory and honour.
- ⁶ You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
- ⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Gospel: Matthew 6.25-33

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

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