

# *Francis, Oh Francis*

A Sermon for the final week of the Season of Creation

Sunday Oct 14, 2018 ~ St. Paul's Cathedral, Kamloops BC

The Very Rev. Ken Gray

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Welcome friends to my final homily in this year's Season of Creation, and what a ride it has been, a bit hurried and harried given our recent trip to Africa, a timing which could not be avoided, but a wonderfully creative time inspired by a single theme *Simply Living*.

## CONTEMPORARY VOICES

Today's Hebrew Bible reading is part of a story referenced by the present Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Justin Welby:

In the beginning, God said... These words usher in the most extraordinary account of creation: an account of abundance, of multiplicity, of creativity. Creation is God's intricate work of art, and human beings are privileged to be placed within it. In this Season of Creation, we celebrate God the Creator, we thank god for the extraordinary riches of his grace. But we also come in sorrow for the way we have defaced creation and misused it for our own ends. In this Season, let's find again a true vision of what being made in the image of God, caring for creation can mean, and commit ourselves to action.

To archbishop Welby's testimony I add the voice of Archbishop Michael Curry of the Episcopal Church (PLAY VIDEO) who cites four themes:

- God's creation is part of the family of God

- We are co-workers with God in the saving work of restoration and reconciliation
- As followers of Jesus we care for God's world because God cares for God's world
- This is why we care about climate change

## ON FRANCIS

Leaving the present moment, and looking back centuries to St. Francis, You see what a good and great tradition we can claim.

(Notes from Matt Gardner/Lynne McNaughton)

One of the most revered figures in the history of Christianity, St. Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226), lived a life that embodied some of the most deeply held values that we associate with the faith today. In the centuries since his death, successive generations of Christians have discovered their most cherished spiritual qualities reflected in Francis.

In recent decades, Francis has perhaps been most widely associated with the care of creation and the environment. In 1979, Pope John Paul II declared Francis the Patron Saint of Ecology.

His association with the blessing of animals was popularized in 1985 by the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in the Episcopal Diocese of New York, with many congregations following its lead in blessing pets on Francis's feast day. So closely is Francis identified with the environment that the annual Season of Creation celebrated by Christians around the world culminates on Oct. 4 with the Feast of St. Francis.

Though possibly ordained as a deacon, Francis was never ordained a priest. He went directly to the masses and found innovative methods for spreading the Good News among the people . . . “It’s to Francis that we owe the presepio, the crèche, at Christmas—the nativity scene, if you will—because for him it was a way of preaching to people who were illiterate and uneducated. “He’s thinking in his mind, ‘OK, what’s going to make sense to them?’ So he develops the rosary as a prayer technique. He develops the crèche. He probably has some contribution to what are known as the Stations of the Cross, which are all kinesthetic ways for people to hear the gospel preached, not just with their ears.”

## FRANCIS TODAY

So if Francis were in our midst today, what would he say and where and to whom might he preach? And in particular, how might he react to the recent United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report released this past week. I know no one likes to be negative, but we also want to be truthful. So I turn to two of my ACEN colleagues for their thoughts.

We will face irreversible catastrophic changes by 2040, if we continue on our present course, which includes the Paris Agreement of three years ago.

People in some regions of the earth already experience catastrophic changes in the form of unprecedented droughts, flooding, and wildfires.

We must cut 50 per cent of global greenhouse emissions by 2030 and essentially eliminate them by 2050.

The IPCC report points to the scale and depth of changes that we must set in motion – beginning now. These involve nearly every part of our lives, especially economics, food, water, and energy systems, and political will.

“Lamenting our gravitation to the greed systems of the world that have resulted in gross inequalities and poverty, and continue to rape the earth, erode the dignity of humanity, and break genuine communion; our distortion of the Gospel by focusing narrowly on individual salvation rather than the redemption of all creation.”

And finally, here is a response from friends in the Church of England, who worship and minister in a country and church which has significantly reduced energy consumption:

Reaching net zero — stopping climate change at 1.5°C of warming — means reversing (our) dependence on coal, oil, and gas in a period of just 30 years: one tenth of the amount of time it took us to reach this stage. And doing so without diminishing standards of living.

It is not a trivial task. But the IPCC report tells us that it is not impossible.

Last year, the UK’s carbon-dioxide emissions from fossil-fuel use fell to a level last seen in 1890 . . . And yet, clearly, British life did not return to a time before antibiotics, fully funded state education, and universal suffrage. The modern reality is that emissions are falling as the economy grows. Emissions are falling because the economy is moving from goods to services; because we now use energy much

more efficiently than in 1890; and because use of coal, the most polluting of fossil fuels, is down to nearly zero.

So back to Francis . . . How might he challenge us today. Well he is reputed to say, “Pray always, and when necessary, use words.” Which really means let your deeds speak. To this end we have initiated this year the *Francis Award*, to be given annually to a person or organization which embodies the spirit and wisdom of St. Francis. I am pleased to announce this year’s winner, the Turtle Valley Donkey Refuge.

<https://turtlevalleydonkeyrefuge.com/>

A number of key parishioners including youth are supporters of this amazing ministry. I invite Tricia Steenson to come forward as nominator to receive the award and a donation on behalf of TVDR. As a snapshot of this amazing ministry, hear part of their story which begins with three words: *We Love Donkeys!*

Since 1999, the Turtle Valley Donkey Refuge has been offering refuge to donkeys. Our purpose is similar to other animal shelters that provide services to domestic animals, but we specialize in donkeys which cannot be adopted due to their ongoing physical health and often mental health issues. For the rest of their lives, our donkeys remain with us here at their Forever Home. The Refuge is dedicated to ensuring that these loyal, stoic creatures are given the care and consideration that they have earned through service during the early development of industry in British Columbia and now as most often misunderstood companions to farm animals and humans. The TVDR embraces and provides the Five Freedoms which are:

- Freedom from Hunger and Thirst – by providing ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
- Freedom from Discomfort – by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease – by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour – by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
- Freedom from Fear and Distress – by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

So I encourage you to support the TVDR as you are able. And finally, Thank You, for your part in this year's Season of Creation celebration. I hope you can find fresh enthusiasm to *live simply so that others may simply live*. And I look forward to developing with the Education Committee another programme for next year, in a new Season of Creation initiative, part of a movement which thankfully is generating interest and lively programming across the Anglican Church of Canada. It's about time, and indeed, the time is now!