**Creation care and St. Francis Oct.4 at St. John the Baptist Anglican, Kars, ON**

Opening prayer:

*Fear, separation, hate and anger come from the wrong view that you and the Earth are two separate entities, that the Earth is only the environment.  So breathe in and be aware of your body and look deeply into it and realize you are the Earth and your consciousness is also the consciousness of the earth. We are but one part of God’s creation and just as we are not separate from God we are not separate from his creation. When it laughs, we laugh. When it cries, we cry. Today let us realize this reality and let it guide our every step. Help us to see that everyone is our neighbour; this includes the animals, plants, soil, water and air we breathe to keep us alive. As the great commandment says: Love the Lord your God and your neighbour as yourself.*

Today is the feast day of St. Francis. There are reports that almost 800 years ago he gave a sermon to the birds. This symbolic act began our long Christian journey to include of all creation in God’s salvation promise.

This happened right at the point in Francis’ life where Francis was struggling with a deep personal dilemma: Should he retire from the world and devote himself entirely to prayer or should he continue traveling about as a preacher of the gospel?

To answer this question Saint Francis sent brothers to seek the advice of two of his most trusted colleagues. Word came back very quickly from both that God wants Francis to keep proclaiming the good news of God’s saving love.

The tale is told that no sooner did Francis hear their response than he immediately stood up, and he took to the roads, where he encountered a flock of birds and preached to them as if they were endowed with reason saying:

‘Oh birds, my brothers and sisters, you praise your Creator as I do. Could it be that both birds and men share equally in blessings from the God who created us both from the dust and breathed life into us? Could it be that Christ came to save you as much as he came to save men?

Now Francis clearly knew that the birds could not speak Italian. All that was different about him was that he had devoted all this being to becoming as Christ and was thus able to look at the Bible with fresh eyes.

For example, his sermon to the birds can be seen to be inspired by the great Commission in Mark 16:15:

*Preach the word of God to****all****creation.*

And also by John 3:16

*God so loved****the world****that he sent his only begotten son.*

He loved THE WORLD – not only human beings.

These words were always there for people see but Francis was the first to see it in this new way – that salvation is for ALL creation. Thus, we not more important than other created beings, for all God’s creatures are his beloved. Yes, we have the unique role of being his stewards to help care for what he made, as stated in Genesis 2:

 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it & take care of it.

However, that does not give us power **over** creation, is gives us the great responsibility to act on behalf of God in ways that care and nurture and respect his creation by acting in ways that he would approve - and I do think that destroying species in the current 6th mass extinction is what he had in mind.

Even the Old Testament creation worships God and because it does, does that not infer that creation and all the creatures and plants and rocks and water in it are part of God’s salvation?

Isaiah 55   “For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

And in Revelation 5    And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

Let’s make this a bit more concrete.

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan monk residing in New Mexico, tells this story.   I recently learned that I would have to put down my 15 old black Lab because she was suffering from inoperable cancer. Venus had been giving me a knowing and profoundly accepting look for weeks, but I did not know how to read it. Deep down, I did not want to know. After her diagnosis, every time I looked at her, she gazed up at me with those same soft and fully permissive eyes, as if to say, “It is okay. You can let me go. I know it is my time.” But she patiently waited until I, too, was ready.

In the weeks before she died, Venus *somehow*communicated to me that all sadness, whether cosmic, human, or canine, is one and the same. Somehow, her eyes were all eyes, even God’s eyes, and the sadness she expressed was a divine and universal sadness.

When we carry our small suffering in solidarity with humanity’s one universal longing for deep union, it helps keep us from self-pity or self-preoccupation. We know that we are all in this together. It is just as hard for everybody else, and our healing is bound up in each other’s. Almost all people are carrying a great and secret hurt, even when they don’t know it.This realization softens the space around our overly defended hearts. It makes it hard to be cruel to anyone. It somehow makes us one—in a way that easy comfort and entertainment never can.

Some mystics go so far as to say that individual suffering doesn’t exist at all and that there is only one suffering. It is all the same, and it is all the suffering of God. The image of Jesus on the cross somehow communicates that to the willing soul. A Crucified God is the dramatic symbol of *the one suffering*that God fully enters into *with us*—much more than just *for us,*as many Christians were trained to think.

It turns out, no surprise, that this way of seeing seems to converge with Aboriginal thinking in what our relationship with nature is. This is made clear in the writings of Grey Owl, an Englishman who, after suffering through WWI, spent his life as an Ojibway. He wrote about “the beaver people”; an Ojibway concept he learned from his Ojibway wife Anahari. In several books and during many public events during the 1930s, he was the first CDN to make the point that Nature had its own inherent value. It did not exist simply as a resource to be exploited, Nature had a being in and of itself that had intrinsic value – just as the life of every human being has intrinsic value – rich or poor, black or white – it doesn’t matter; in God’s eyes were are all his beloved children.     He said this: Remember you belong to nature, not it to you.

I leave you with this short video of a man playing piano in an elephant sanctuary. It makes the same point I have been making with music – which speaks more directly to our hearts and, I hope, can move you in ways that mere words cannot. May the love of God that gives you life fill your hearts so that you can extend the same gift of life that God has given us to all his creation.

**PLAY VIDEO**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOr2O0FfpT8>

My final prayer is from St.Francis’s Canticle of the Creatures:

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
yours is the praise,
the glory and the honor and every blessing.

To you alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no one is worthy to speak your name.

Praised be you, my Lord with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who is the day through whom you bring us light.

And he is lovely, shining with great splendor,
for he heralds you, Most High.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars.
In heaven you have formed them,
lightsome and precious and fair.

And praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind, through
air and cloud, through calm
and every weather by which you sustain your creatures.

Praised be you, my Lord,
through Sister Water,
so very useful and humble, precious and chaste.

Praised be you, my Lord
through Brother Fire,
by whom you light up the night, and he is
handsome and merry, robust and strong.

Praised be you, my Lord,
through our Sister, Mother Earth,
who sustains us and directs us
bringing forth all kinds of fruits
and colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be you, my Lord
through those who forgive
and for your love.

Blessings,

***Gordon Kubanek, P.Eng. TSSF***