

Good morning, God's people!

Today is the beginning of the Season of Creation at St. Peter's. For the next several weeks, we reorient our lives towards God our Creator; revel in the beauty and wisdom of the created world. As well as commit to what can be a sharp examination into our current relationship with the rest of creation. On a global scale, this relationship is marked by misuse, greed, and willful ignorance. Facing this can be difficult and even overwhelming, but we know it is critical to our call to be Christ's hands and heart in this world.

At St. Peter's, we begin Creation Season with the Feast of St. Francis and the Blessing of the Animals. This beloved tradition grounds the season in joy. And we need joy. My husband, Roger, and I have this daily practice of sending each other pictures of cute animals. Maybe you also do this with family and friends. I don't spend too much time reflecting on why this brings me such joy. But, ridiculous cuteness aside, I think it has something to do with seeing intentional, loving relationship. The pictures and videos we send each other – and the experience of blessing animals today – are always in the context of relationships, from interspecies friendship between a pig and a kitten to a dachshund dressed up as a hot dog. *Someone* put the costume on that dog! Which means that dog is known and loved by someone. The relationship is shared with the world. Our desire for loving connection, and the joy that it brings, is confirmed.

Perhaps we kick off Creation Season with this joyful tradition so we can experience how the "awww" of witnessing each other with our animals can lead to the awe in God choosing loving connection as the foundation for God's good creation.

It is this awe that guided St. Francis.

Francis is a fascinating figure. This monastic theologian mystic who lived in the late 12th and early 13th centuries. The lover of animals whose image is stationed in many a garden today. The founder of a religious order that sought to live like Christ did, by taking vows of poverty and relying fully on the care of others. (We shouldn't gloss over how radical that interpretation of Christ is.) The cosmic poet whose Canticle of the Sun restores our rightful place alongside, not in the center of, our siblings: the Sun and

water and even death. Last year, Dick Ullman preached about how Francis met with Sultan Malik Al-kamil in Egypt fostering open dialogue between Christianity and Islam...during the Fifth Crusade.

Like most beloved saints, Francis seems larger than life. But more than remembering his accolades, Francis would direct us toward that awe in the interwoven web of relationships and how it guided him. While Francis did not write this, I imagine him liking it very much:

Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.
A recognition of shared humanity.
An acknowledgement of interdependence.
A sense of kinship at the core of our being.
Daily we choose
Who we acknowledge as kin
By who we protect,
Share resources with,
Believe,
Grow alongside,
Apologize to,
Dance, eat, and weep with.
May we resist every system
Of domination that turns
Us against our own
Flesh and bone.

This word from [Enfleshed Liturgy](#) focuses on the human family, but imagine it swelling to all of creation. It captures what Francis knew and celebrated – that we were created for relationship. It is in giving that we receive, in pardoning that we are pardoned – so the prayer attributed to the saint says. In loving, we are loved. Relational. God’s creation is a creation of kinship.

Unlike Francis, we do not always treat this as good news. Sometimes, we aren't even willing to admit it's true. But it is, for better or worse. We need each other. If we neglect or abuse another, we do so ultimately to our own detriment as well.

In the moments we are willing to admit this, we treat this kinship with a "my brother's keeper" attitude. A complex statement from a complex story in Genesis, but I use it here to mean an approach that sees our interconnectedness as an unfair obligation. One that prompts us to act from a place of scarcity. Where justice is achieved through punishment, and our desire to change is fueled by self-interest or shame.

I feel the burden of kinship. God does not condone nor expect us to stay in abusive relationships. The bond of cosmic kinship does not imprison us. Like the ligaments that connect our joints and bones, it is a bond that enlivens us, helps us to live and move and have our being in the world. I believe wholeheartedly that, in God's dream, we get free *together*. But, with the seemingly never-ending stories of suffering happening to every part of creation, for the first time in a long time, I feel burdened by this bond.

Our gospel has that famous passage: "Come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Do you notice how the rest Jesus promises doesn't come from setting anything down, but picking something up? Not getting rid of our burdens but learning to carry them as Christ does. My yoke is easy and so my burden is light. The burden is lightened by the strength of the yoke. And the yoke of Christ is always love. The burden - or perhaps better said, the *complexity* - of kinship is carried by love. The complexity of kinship is carried by love.

Jesus no doubt understood and fiercely addressed the injustices and abuses of his time, and through the power of the Spirit hastens us to do the same. But, as Francis understood, we must root this call in love. My favorite Eucharistic Prayer says, "Living among us, Jesus loved us." And then tells us how he lived that love: "He broke bread with outcasts and sinners. He healed the sick and proclaimed good news to the poor."

Consider what marks your life, receives your time and energy. What is the prayer you are writing?

Again, from the piece I read earlier:

Daily we choose
Who we acknowledge as kin
By who we protect,
Share resources with,
Believe,
Grow alongside,
Apologize to,
Dance, eat, and weep with.

All of these are part of kinship. And they are only possible, only bearable, if they begin with love.

As those gathered together in Christ, carrying the complexity of kinship with the yoke of love, I wrote a prayer for our lives as a faith community right now.

Living among us, Jesus loved us. And so, living among creation, we love.

We find ourselves in a season of transition and, hopefully, transformation.
We learn how to tell hard truths and center the vulnerable.
We break bread with each other, holding space for each of our burdens and joys.
We continue to feed our neighbors in old ways and new ways, too.
We open our hearts to what it means to care for creation.
We sing, still.
We will soon bless some very cute animals,
 making a beautiful, silly, and joyful scene
 glimpsing God's kingdom: creation in harmony.

Yes, living among us, Jesus loved us. And so, living among creation, we love.

May it be so. Amen.