

St Francis Day transferred
September 30th, 2018
Matthew 11: 25-30
Rev. Sharon Smith

Stewards of Earth – Fools ahead of our Time

Objectives:

- (1) To open up to the reality that everything material is spiritual and a revelation of Christ – linking the Cosmic Christ to values of earth care.
 - (2) To explore some practical ways to carry this out in community, as fools in the footsteps of St Francis.
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Introduction:

Eight Centuries ago, a fool roamed the streets of a small town in Italy, called Assisi

- Born wealthy yet he opted for the way of poverty.
- Called to rebuild the church, he stripped naked in front of the bishop and walked around in sackcloth
- Gifted with passion, he chose to preach to birds, cattle, dogs, cats and pigs. (kind of like I'm doing this morning)

This fool was Saint Francis.

And he followed the words of Jesus in our gospel reading this morning:

“God hides things from the wise and the intelligent and reveals them to infants and ordinary folks” (words from the Message translation)

The Fool is the one who helps us to see things anew and to dismantle the accepted wisdom of our times.

Eight centuries later, the foolishness of St Francis, is now called eco-justice. Faith leaders, scientists, and savvy politicians are inviting us to follow his way.

So just what is the way of Jesus, revealed to us in the life of St Francis the Fool?

Ilia Delio, is a Franciscan Sister in Washington, DC – she is a theologian specializing in the area of science and religion.

In her book:

Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth

She writes that:

St Francis' example invites us:

First – to Praise Creator God.

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The beauty of nature moves us beyond ourselves.
You just have to take a bus over the Lions Gate Bridge and watch how people slowly lift their heads away from their cell phones to take in the beauty.
We are awed by this creativity. And it is the creativity of God.

There are somewhere between 8.5 and 12 million species on earth.
Humans have only been able to name 1 sixth of life's diversity.
It is increasingly greater than our understanding.

**And so we following the way of Francis are moved to pray:
Praise be You God with all Your creatures.**

**Second - Francis' example invites us
To experience God in creation.**

Francis believed that God walked in creation in the person of Jesus Christ.

When we talk about Jesus, we are usually referring to a God-man, whose life and stories are written in the Gospels included in our Christian Bible.
Jesus is referred here as God's WORD made flesh. With God in the beginning, all things come into being through Christ.

*Whenever the material and the spiritual coincide, there is Christ.
The Cosmic Christ.*

So when we talk about Christ we are describing something much bigger and older than Jesus of Nazareth.

At Creations Beginning – there was Christ – word made flesh
When fire was discovered, or nuclear energy – there was Christ – material and spiritual coinciding.
Whenever a new star bursts into form on the edges of our galaxy – there is Christ!
The Cosmic Christ.

(For more on this research the writings and work of Teilhard de Chardin)

We need to enlarge our understanding of God.
We are living in the eco-house of God.
And everywhere is God revealed. Creator, Christ, Spirit.

Ilia Delio writes, "The conventional visualization of the physical world was changed by Einstein who showed that matter is itself a form of energy"

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Everything is both matter and energy.

And energy is spirit; this is a Christological world. God's word made flesh. And to really know the fullness of Christ, we are invited to live attentively to the particularities of all of creation.

The late Alan Rabinowitz known to some as the Indiana Jones of wildlife conservation, devoted his life to biology and the discovery of new animal species.

In an interview earlier this year, he described his childhood journey toward this profession:

"He was a very, very severe stutterer as a child, for as long as he can remember.

Because he stuttered, people viewed him in different ways.

The school system classified him as handicapped and having special needs, so he was put in special classes from kindergarten until sixth grade. He grew up very much inside of his own head.

There was one thing he could do without stuttering - he could speak to animals.

There was no expectation and no judgment there.

His animals were little green turtles and hamsters and chameleons, and that's who he would speak to. He would be mute all day long in school, and he would come home and speak to animals.

The particularities of creation expressed in this story says something of the gentleness, kindness, love and acceptance of Christ – these enfleshments of God given to Alan when he could find it nowhere else.

And because of his attentiveness to these animals. Alan vowed that if he was ever able to find his voice, that he would be the animals voice. He would be there for them.

**Similarly, and lastly the way St Francis' related to creation invites us
Into reflection and action.**

To speak of the creation as our home is to speak of creation as relationship.

The word creation, unlike the word nature, implies relationship. Creation points to a Creator in relationship with the natural world, including us as humans.

The earth is God's – it does not belong to us, though we utilize its resources as if it does.

We are invited to relate to the earth in love, in care and with respectful responsibility, as God's stewards.

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Francis walked humbly and related to nature horizontally.
Creatures were his kin, his brothers and sisters.

What would it be like if we no longer saw ourselves as entitled consumers of earth's resources but as her family, her kin?
Perhaps we, like Francis, would be moved to protect that which we love and to which we belong.

When creation becomes our kin...

- We say thank you for what we have

When creation becomes our kin...

- We stand up for her in the political sphere and vote with caution.

When creation becomes our kin...

- We make careful economic choices – surrounding ourselves with things that are her friends - environmental friendly food, fiber and forestry products.

When creation becomes our kin...

- We not walk all over her, but measure our ecological footprint – reducing our use of resources and reducing our amount of waste.

When creation becomes our kin...

- We care for our bodies, our pets, our fellow humans as we care for Christ.

For it is foolish not to. For we are human, humus, of the earth.

Let us be fools - ahead of our time.

I invite you now in the stillness to ponder the question:

How do you practically care for earth?

- It might be how you deal with waste – e.g. recycling or composting
- Or how you live more simply, e.g. buying second hand clothes

Amen.