

Sermon and Readings for:

4 October 2026 - Blessing of Pets, Francis of Assisi

Psalm 148

- 1 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord from heaven: O praise him in the heights.
- 2 Praise him, all his angels: O praise him, all his host.
- 3 Praise him, sun and moon: praise him, all you stars of light.
- 4 Praise him, you highest heaven: and you waters that are above the heavens.
- 5 Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded and they were made.
- 6 He established them for ever and ever: he made an ordinance which shall not pass away.
- 7 O praise the Lord from the earth: praise him, you sea-monsters and all deeps;
- 8 Fire and hail, mist and snow: and storm-wind fulfilling his command;
- 9 Mountains and all hills: fruit trees and all cedars;
- 10 Beasts of the wild, and all cattle: creeping things and winged birds;
- 11 Kings of the earth, and all peoples: princes, and all rulers of the world;
- 12 Young men and maidens: old folk and children together.
- 13 Let them praise the name of the Lord: for his name alone is exalted.
- 14 His glory is above earth and heaven: and he has lifted high the horn of his people.
- 15 Therefore he is the praise of all his servants: of the children of Israel, a people that is near him. Praise the Lord.

Galatians 6.14-18

14 May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! 16 As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body. 18 May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

Matthew 11.25-30

²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have

been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Sermon

Recently Karen and I attended church in Montville, the New Testament reading for the day was from St. Paul’s speech in Acts 17. Part of it goes like this:

“From one ancestor God made all peoples to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps fumble about for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us.” (Acts 17.26-27)

The phrase that grabbed my attention was; *“so that they would search for God and perhaps fumble about for him and find him . . .”*

We just heard Jesus say; *Father, Lord of heaven and earth! I thank you because you have revealed to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned.*” (Matt 11:25f)

Today we are giving thanks for the blessing of pets in our lives and we also are commemorating Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animal lovers. Francis had a profound heart for creation and is said to have preached to the birds and animals. Tradition tells us that he recognised all creation, and all creatures as “brother and sister”, which is beautifully expressed in the “Canticle of the Creatures”. (*see below*)

St Francis is also the patron saint of peace-makers, and ecologists, and so we focus also on praying for peace in the midst of the many conflicts going on at the moment. Also we give thanks for the beauty and abundance of creation, and we pray as it faces the challenges of climate change, natural disaster, exploitation, and extinction.

St Francis is known for his acts of compassion towards lepers and outcasts and those living on the margins.

The prayer attributed to St Francis, *Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,*” is after the Lord’s Prayer is probably one of the best known of all prayers.

Often we view saints as people who have found God and God’s purpose for their life, people who got it “right” all the time, people who were perfect.

Throughout the course of his life Francis refused to join the wise and learned, those who are certain of what is “right”. Francis was a man who “*fumbled about*” trying to find God, trying to find what he was supposed to do with his life, trying to find what is “right”, and he knew he wasn’t perfect.

It should come as no surprise that I identify with Francis. Along with many others, I have spent a lot of time “*fumbling about*” trying to find God, trying to find God’s purpose, trying to find what is “right”, and I am definitely not perfect. Francis “*fumbled about*” for much of his early life trying to find purpose and direction for his life.

One of his better known “*fumblings*” came about because of a dream. According to tradition Francis dreamt that he was in a large room full of knights’ armour and weapons, and all the trappings of chivalry. In the dream Jesus says, “Francis, I want you to be my knight.” His idealistic dream was probably inspired by the popular literature of the time. Knights in shining armour vanquished dragons, rescued fair maidens, and generally did the ‘*right thing*’.

Francis described his dream to his father, a prosperous merchant in Assisi, and I am confident that his father was very pleased with Francis’ ambition. At the time Assisi was engaged in one of its many wars with the neighbouring city of Perugia. As a middle-class merchant having his son fight for the city, outfitted as if he were a Lord, would have appealed to Francis’ ambitious father. So he bought him; armour, swords, lances, shields, gowns, a horse and all the equipment required by a knight.

However, Francis was already showing signs of who he was to become. When the day came to ride into battle, he noticed that among the assembled knights there was an impoverished nobleman who had no armour, no horse, no sword, and none of the necessary equipment. So Francis gave his entire outfit away, and marched off to war unarmed.

Predictably this proved disastrous. He was captured and imprisoned. When he was finally ransomed, he was seriously ill.

Francis then reasoned, that if Jesus had wanted him to be a knight, something was clearly going wrong. Perhaps, he had got the message wrong. He continued to “*fumble about*” searching for his destiny. What could it mean to be Jesus’ knightly champion?

Later, after he had renounced his family, and gone off to live the life of a hermit, he was praying in the ruined church of San Damiano, the figure of Jesus spoke to him from the crucifix, saying, Francis, rebuild my church, which, as you see, is falling down.”

Francis looked around and saw that, indeed, the church of San Damiano was falling down. He immediately began putting stone on stone, rebuilding the church. The people of Assisi thought he was mad. Slowly, after more “*fumbling about*”, he began to understand that again, he had not “got it right”.

It wasn't until much later in his life that he understood what Jesus had meant by “rebuild my Church”. The Church at the time was dysfunctional, more concerned with political power and material wealth than with its ministry and mission.

Francis by his example and preaching initiated change. Over time men and women of faith joined him, ministering to those in need, those living on the margins, lepers and outcasts.

Another bit of “*fumbling about*” is seen in the austerity that he was famous for. He would throw ashes into his food to stop him enjoying it. He called his Body “Brother Ass” and was known to roll naked in thorns and snow to discipline his body. As he lay dying (still a young man at 44), he asked “Brother Ass” to forgive him. Once again, he'd “*fumbled about*” and hadn't got it “right”. Perhaps he realised he'd squandered one of God's gifts by not being kinder to himself.

So what are we to make of this famous saint?

He has been called “*The Other Jesus*” by some.

He is revered and loved universally.

And yet, he seems to have spent a great deal of time “*fumbling about*” trying to find what God was calling him to do.

Perhaps this is what Jesus is talking about when he suggests that the foolish and unlearned may know something that the wise and learned don't.

Perhaps certainty is not what Jesus wants from us.

Maybe Saint Francis shows us something completely different, something that looks more like perseverance in the face of uncertainty.

Maybe the lesson we can learn from Saint Francis is the lesson that “*fumbling about*” and faithfully seeking God is more genuine than certainty.

Maybe humility and unknowing are a more appropriate response to God than the arrogance of certainty.

Perhaps we should abandon the delusion of perfection in an imperfect world.

Perhaps abandoning the pride of self may be the way to begin to understand God.

Or, in the words of Saint Francis' prayer, “*it is in dying that we are born to eternal life*”.

Canticle of the Creatures by St. Francis of Assisi

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing,
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.

...
Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

