

Sermon for Season of Creation – Feast of St. Francis
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Turning Toward the Lilies

Let me first say how profoundly grateful I am for the contemplative tone of the Season of Creation, 2019. All about us, is the cacophony of voices of threat and violence, suspicion and judgment. How hard it is not to become entrapped by all the forces of evil at work in the world about us! How essential it is for us, as followers in the Way of Love, the Way of Jesus, to gather around this sacramental table to be reminded of ***Whose we are in the deepest and most intimate ways and by Whom we are each called to be agents of nothing less than “LOVE.”*** We are nourished by the sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood so that we become more and more like the One we receive.

Hear and commit to your heart, the powerful words of the Eucharistic Prayer C which we so often pray throughout the liturgical year:

Open our eyes to see your hand in the world about us.

Deliver us from coming to this

*Table for solace only, and not for strength, for pardon only,
and not for renewal. Let*

***the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ,
that we may worthily serve the world in his name.***

Open our eyes, deliver us, make us one, is a prayer to be offered only if you mean it. Such is a prayer for deep conversion and transformation of each of us in mind, body, and spirit. Is this what we are really praying for these days? If not, it can cost us and all Creation, life itself.

My dear friends in Christ, please understand these words to be your Divinely given “marching orders.” These words, echoing the promises of our baptismal covenant, orient us in the only way we are to live our faith in Jesus Christ in the world. This holy sacrament given to us by Jesus himself serves to strengthen us

and renew us in times like the ones we experience these days. Wherein every day there are multiple assaults mounted against God's Shalom across the globe. And today, as we celebrate and honor the feast of St. Francis, whose own prayer begs our God to "make us instruments of your peace."

Paul's words from First Corinthians take up this very matter of life and death for the followers of Jesus Christ: that God is faithful to the end as Paul asks the question at the heart of this text, "What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul' or 'I belong to Apollos; or I belong to Cephas' or 'I belong to Christ.' **Has Christ been divided?**" What is your answer to Paul? To whom do you belong? And how does your life give witness to your deepest and truest identity?

We are so beautifully reminded in our Psalm today of all the miraculous ways our Creator has offered all creation abundant life... grass to grow for cattle, plants for people to use... where trees provide shelter for the birds, high mountains for the wild goats... where the moon marks the seasons... Open our eyes, indeed, O God, as we take upon ourselves and recommit to our vocation as Stewards of Creation!

In a blogpost I read this week, the Rev. Anna Blaedel wrote:

In the 1987 film translated from the French, "The Sorceress"; a Dominican friar enters a village in search of heretics during the Inquisition. He meets a woman, a midwife/healer, who cares for the bodies of the villagers. He seeks her out and she asks him to teach her to read, maybe even to write. What, he wonders could she possibly want to write about? "Plants and rocks, she proclaims. "I'd tell how the flowers turn toward the sun which they love." To which the Friar responds, "One writes about God's truths, not about plants." Missing the holy connection, entirely. ***Liberation is a practice, instead, of courageously, persistently, turning toward that which we love. To turn is to begin the work of reconciliation and repair. To turn toward that which we love is to turn away from that which holds us hostage, entraps us and terrorizes us to the point of forgetting ultimately, whose we are and who we are created to be.***

The Gospels overflow with events of such turning. Away from doctrinal debates, toward feeding each other. Away from religious purity codes, toward right relationship. Away from institutional preservation, toward those who are most vulnerable. Away from abstract theological pronouncements, toward the Divine in whose image we are each made, sharing laughter, tears, sweat, screams, aches, and sighs. Away from suspicion and fear, **toward the lilies.**

In our Gospel text today, Jesus himself asks us to turn toward that which we love...

Consider the ravens... Consider the lilies... if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you- you of little faith!

And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, And Do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these Things... Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, is a Professor of Environmental and Forest Biology at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry writes:

I want to raise a song for all those beings knit together by the roots of prairie sod. I refuse to write a eulogy for one alone, because the very notion of separability is at the root of the crisis we have created. The life of one is inseparable from the life of another."

That's not just good science that's also gospel truth. It is what Jesus commends to us in every parable, in every healing, in every miracle. In today's gospel he commands us to strive for the kingdom... the Kin-dom... the whole of God's Creation... nothing separate, nothing excluded. In Jesus' own prayer, he begs *May they be one as the Creator and I are one...*

In a recent article from Oprah's "O" magazine, I read about a pack of rescue dogs saving the environment one sniff at a time. Megan Parker founded the non-profit, Working Dogs for Conservation, that helps canine become detectives on behalf of wildlife and their habits. These once rejected shelter dogs are working to end wildlife crime such as poaching and trafficking around the globe. They are working in the area of biological threats, such as invasive species of plants, animals, invertebrates, or diseases. These rescue dogs are agents of healing and restoration working on behalf of God's beloved and miraculous Creation. These once rejected dogs sentenced to death or living in no kill shelters laboring on behalf of humanity and all creation.

In Blaedel's words:

You and me, inseparable. We and they, inseparable. Creator, creature, and all creation, inseparable. Then and now, here and there, inseparable. Divine truths and plants, and rocks and flowers, inseparable. Grief over all being lost and gratitude for all we love, inseparable, too.

So, my friends, will we turn toward what we love?

Will we, as Jesus commands, turn toward the lilies?