

St Francis sermon, 9 Oct. 05, St. Stephen's, Wakefield St.

1 Corinthians 8: 6b.

The animals *and* man and woman – all created on the same day of creation (however long that was, the sixth day. Probably Francis, the humble poor man from Assisi, who'd been a well off playboy-type (and lived around 1200), St Francis could, probably better than most, tell us what it means that God created animals *and* humans on the same day, in Genesis 1. *And* what it means that humans were created as vegetarians!

Surely one thing it means is that humans should be *careful* about – and care for – the rest of creation. We're so closely tied in with it. We're part of it.

And that means: we should look and listen carefully, lest we blunder and bungle, and blacken and kill our colourful living planet, this beautiful earth and the way it supports and works for us. Yes, care for the creatures and for creation, of which we are part, only a part. –

And care because back of every creature – and for St Francis, right out front as well – is God the Creator, the

loving Creator of heaven and earth, 'through whom are all things', through whom *the whole universe* exists.

In the *Small Catechism* Luther unforgettably teaches us what faith in the Creator of heaven and earth means: 'I believe that God has created me and all creatures...' You and I are no exceptions, with everything else we belong to, we depend on God.

Francis – he was never ordained – preached to people, and to the animals. This was not light relief on his part, or a mere odd quirk of this 'little poor brother', or this eccentric failed fool of a man, reduced - in his cheerfully endured sufferings - to little more in the end than a walking shadow of the wounded, flogged, crucified Jesus. Disciple and imitator was Francis. He knew the Creator's powerful Word in and through Christ. Creation, the work of a humane, humble and hopeful God, God of love and grace.

Creation's not a hatchet job. God w-o-r-d-s creation into existence; he says 'Let there be...' And there, with elegant ease, it is! Out of nothing! Creation and all things exist by

him, who is the very Word of God, the Creator made flesh, made creature among the cattle in the stall.

And if God's creative word and will would change or fail, every last bit of creation, every faint background echo of the big bang would disappear off the screen, all would fall back into – nothing! But the miraculous universe continues, *we* continue because His creative word, will and act are graciously and dynamically ongoing. Each creature a reminder just by being there. Each suffering creature a reminder that in Christ God has come right home into what's turned into such a flawed and sin-stricken scene. In Christ, the same eternal Word, he who has created it, has also done all to redeem it.

We don't get much further than thanks to God for all that. Our whole lives are to be an 'Alleluia!' Laud the Lord, all people! And all creatures! St Francis got no further. And we can see why it's been said: 'He was a poet whose whole life was a poem' [Chesterton 102]. An 'Alleluia poem'. Involving others.

It's recorded that on the way home from Rome to Assisi Francis and friends came across a great gathering of birds. When he saw them, so the record,

‘he ran swiftly toward them... He was a man of great fervor, feeling much sweetness and tenderness even toward lesser, irrational creatures. When he was already very close, seeing that they awaited him, he greeted them in his usual way [“The Lord give you peace”]. He was quite surprised, however, when the birds did not take flight, as they usually do. Filled with great joy, he humbly requested that they listen to the word of God:

“My brother birds [he said], you should greatly praise your Creator and love him always. He gave you feathers to wear, wings to fly, and whatever you need. God made you noble among his creatures and gave you a home in the purity of the air, so that, though you neither sow nor reap, he nevertheless protects and governs you without your least care.”

The birds stretched their necks, spread their wings, opened their beaks and looked at him. He passed through their midst, coming and going, touching their heads and bodies with his tunic. Then he blessed them, and having made the sign of the cross, gave them permission to fly

off to another place... And from that day on, he carefully exhorted all birds, all animals, all reptiles, and also insensible creatures, to praise and love the Creator'. [Spoto 100].

Praise the Creator and love him! How much more we, who know *him and his love* to the nth degree, and revealed in Christ helpless among the Christmas cattle, and helping the world on the hard wood of the cross. Love to the nth degree! Praise and honour him! In your life, your 'Alleluia poem'.

The creatures are blessed having their life from the Word and being drawn by the Word into *praising God*. That's it! 'Alleluia' ('Praise the Lord') is what *unites us with them* most deeply, [as we'll sing it soon in that great hymn of St Francis, 'All creatures of our God and King']. Its praise unites the creation now. And, as we heard from the Revelation reading, it's what the myriads will sing surrounding the throne of God. Praise opens the eyes to reality, final reality! For, as Luther said at table one day, we're so lucky, we find ourselves right now 'living in the dawning light of eternal day, and we're getting real

knowledge of the creatures; which with Adam's fall we'd lost.'

Luther was on to something – as usual. It *was* the time of the Renaissance! Open eyes, reality, science, praise of God – they're on the same line, they all go together!

Laud the Lord, brothers and sisters, humans, and all creatures! Alleluia.

Praise the Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
the God of all that *is*,
that *was*,
and *that is still to come*. Amen.