

## Finding Rest

Sermon, September 25, 2022

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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"Come to me. Come to me, all who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Has there ever been a day in your life when that didn't sound like good news? Ever? "Come, you who are working hard. Come, you who others have put burdens upon. Come, and I will give you rest."

It's a great promise of faith, isn't it? I mean, does that feel good? Some days, I feel like if we could just say that over and over for the next three or four minutes, that'd be enough.

Stepping away from our normal patterns and schedules and lists, those that we have chosen for ourselves, and others that those have chosen for us, stepping away from those and coming to Jesus, bringing our burdens and laying them at the feet of Jesus... that, by whatever means we find to do that, is restful.

And if it doesn't seem so on the first try, at least for me, what I've found that what that means is, I need, as my grandmother has said, is sit a spell. Just sit a spell.

Sometimes even then, the monkeys are still going, right? So sometimes, for me, I need to invite my anxiety and fear, my anger and my burdens, to come and sit there with us. Let's just sit a bit.

Let's see if we don't find rest for our souls.

In my house sometimes, the way that we sit a while is one of our feline companions gets in our lap and has a different idea than we do about when it's time to get up and get going.

You will find rest for your soul. I find that to be true. And if you need to, give me a call. Let's talk. Because we need rest, every single one of us.

This is a promise that is one of the good promises, I think, and yet – of course, there's always an "and yet" – and yet I found myself wondering this week, what in the world that has to do with St. Francis, or what that has to do with the Blessing of the Animals.

Here at St. Mary's, we like other churches find a Sunday that is both convenient and near to the feast of St. Francis as a Sunday to bless animals and remember St. Francis. For the life of me, I couldn't figure out, though, why is this the Gospel lesson appointed for such a day as that?

And so, being like priests are, that means I go and read. Read about Francis and try to figure out where's an entry there. I also look at images and paintings and drawings and art that's been made around remembering the life of St. Francis.

Many of you, of course, already know, the thing about St. Francis is the way he became the founder of the Franciscan order is what he first did, was he renounced a life of considerable generational wealth. One of the things you don't see many images of is the story of in the city square, as he was renouncing all of this wealth and

turning in a new way to his faith, he took off all of his clothes in the middle of the town square and said, "I don't even want to wear the clothes that come out of this wealth!"

(There weren't that many pictures of that.)

But what seems to me to have happened in those moments is that Francis begins to see Others – "Others" with a capital O – we know that he began to see the poor and their plight in a different way, and he began to see non-human creatures also, and the Earth itself.

And I suspect that as he began to see, he found not only cute and cuddly animals, but some feral and scary ones too. And not only romanticized poor, but people who were indeed carrying burdens that other people put on them.

He saw beasts of burden, both human and non-human, who were weary of trying their best to flourish, who were working hard to maintain basic health and dignity.

I suspect that Francis came to hear Jesus's words slightly differently to those whose work wasn't chosen, to those who were bearing burdens others placed, and I wonder if those idyllic-looking scenes of Francis surrounded by animals were in fact the moments when Francis said to those around him, of all sorts of creatures, "Come. Come and rest."

I wonder if he found ways to create space for creatures to look like something beyond being useful, but to be themselves, and to be regarded deeply as that. Who doesn't find rest in moments when someone sees you and invites you just as you are to sit with them?

It's just so easy to hear Jesus's promise, and it's a good one, to come and bring ourselves and our burdens to him, to rest. I like that part real well. But it's also messy. When we begin to hear that this is not only an invitation to us, but it is also a mission for us, right? If we are the body of Christ, if we are the ongoing Christ presence in this world, in this place, in this time, then it seems to me that we too must ask, how do we invite the weary and the burdened to find rest?

The weary and burdened persons, and weary and burdened creation that carries much that we lay upon it.

Maybe some of you have somebody in your life – I have somebody like this in my life – who, the times when I am the most exhausted and anxious and burdened, this person says to me, "You just need to rest a little more!" It's just not that helpful.

I've learned from Rev. Michael to say, "What can I do? What can I take? What's on your plate that we can find somebody else for?" That's helpful, right?

It seems to me that one of our tasks, of many, and the task of each of us as people of faith who follow Jesus, is to find ways to live out that promise to others, to say, "Come. I see you're tired, I see you're carrying stuff, let's find rest. Come and sit."

This has always been the deepest notion of Sabbath in the scriptures, right? It's not because God just needs one day for us to praise God a little differently. It's not even because God needed rest. It was because God says we need to rest and we need to offer rest for everyone else, for creation, for other people who serve us.

It is here, I think that we can learn from St. Francis, and we can learn from what he learned from the creatures around him. That we are the recipients of good news for ourselves. And we have a message of good news for the world around us.

Now to this God, let us give honor and praise today and forever.

Amen.

**Genesis 9:8-17**

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

**Romans 8:18-25**

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

**Matthew 11:25-30**

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

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'