

**4 October 2020**  
**Creation Sunday and Francis of Assisi 2020**

“The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and untried”.

These words were spoken by English writer, philosopher and theologian G K Chesterton years ago. I suspect there would be many others who would agree with his words and sentiments. People of faith do not always act as we call others to do. As Francis Moloney reminds us, “we are both the broken and forgiven people of God “, seeking to live our lives for the other, and for God.

Many of us who may be sceptics, agnostics and doubters about the causes of climate change would probably agree that over the years, despite the influence of Christianity in our civil life, we have not lived up to the ideal or standards we have set for ourselves and others. We have not advocated respect or due diligence in the way we have used the resources of the earth for our own benefit. In fact, for many years many Christians understood the first Chapter of Genesis to mean not simply stewardship of the earth resources, but domination meaning they were in charge and to do whatever was necessary for humanity’s benefit {sometimes greed} with little regard for preservation and restoration. We are reminded regularly of the destruction of the habitat for exploration.

There is a sense emerging, not only here in Australia but across the Western world that as we move away from Christian belief and faith we are becoming a more anxious, even confused nation reflected in our treatment of the stranger, changing ethical standards, and blind adherence to ideology that favours some at the expense of others. There appear many who fail to acknowledge fact and instead promote personal opinion and self-interest as more important than the vaccination of children, the need for gun control, growing violence, the need for climate action, and the proliferation of fake news. When I raise these issues I note how some go into a state of denial and refuse to discuss them any further other than to be determined in their views. There are those who paint the past as the way to go while others recognize a level of romanticism associated with such a view. Tom Holland in his recent book titled Dominion argues that the modern western world has failed to understand the source of its present values as sourced in the Christian faith and is currently in a phase of deconstruction of the ethic that has underpinned much of civilization as we have known it for the past 2000 years.

Today we gather together to give thanks for the gift of creation and life something we seem often to take for granted, exploit and even deny as though what we have we own. The fact that 80% of the worlds wealth still remains in the hands of 20% of the global population is fact to this claim.

There are those who believe that humanity has the capacity to save us from our own stupidity and abuse of the divine providence given to us in love by the Divine, and deny that we humans need to exercise greater stewardship over the resources of the earth, the air we breathe and the changes in weather patterns. The mantra is economic growth at all costs and that science and technology can solve any problems that arise. {However, try telling that to the Polar bears who habitat is under threat in the Arctic circle}.

How much have we been reminded during this pandemic that despite all the advances in knowledge including medical science we are at risk and vulnerable.

We have begun to recognize that policies promoted by all political parties to limit government spending and the reduction of taxes has led to much underfunding of essential services to meet the needs of a modern community. {Note the crisis in aged care} We are paying a price for past

negligence and this has contributed to the present trauma and failure to exercise stewardship of God given resources.

As we gather let us remind ourselves of the awesome responsibility that God has placed in our hands.

Today is also the feast day of St Francis. He was the son of a wealthy textile merchant. His father's wealth and as the story goes Francis' own charisma made the young man a leader of the youth in his town. By the year 1200 it is said he became a rock star of his own.

As a boy he dreamed of glory in battle and he enlisted with other young men of Assisi to fight in a feud with a neighbouring city/State. Defeat and a serious illness in prison had a life changing effect on Francis and on a pilgrimage to Rome he came face to face with a beggar outside of St Peter's Church. Moved by what he saw he swapped places with the beggar and spent the day begging for alms. This experience shocked him. On another occasion he confronted his own fears by hugging a leper. The story goes that as a result of these two experiences Francis' life was turned around.

Can you think of a time when your life was changed or significantly influenced by a similar event?

Francis was a man transformed by the love of God. Not selflove but love for the other. This is the great Christian calling. This love for the other reflects God's love for us and the very reason for creation.

In the book of Job that we read from this morning we are reminded and asked to consider the land, the soil, the animals -all living matter, a mixture of decaying organic matter that enriches the creation over the years and protects and enables humanity to benefit from its presence. The food we eat is fertilized in the soil, the trees provide building material, the waters for drinking and bathing, the sun moon and rains enrich the soil and our lives.

To come back to GK Chesterton, he advised," Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair." This is the essence of Christian faith. Sadly however, much of what we read in main stream media reflects Christian faith as judgemental, privileged and lacking in love for the other. It is a pity that the stories of faith in action as portrayed in this Months' Melbourne Anglican do not find their way into the broader media for they tell very different stories of how people of faith are living their faith in community.

As a faith community here at St George's let us continue in the spirit of Francis as we gather week by week caring and loving one another.

For a few minutes think how you may be able to grow this love in your own life and for those around you.

Dorothy Lee in an article she has wrote for TMA last year says, "blessing is at the heart of Anglican Common life." Her article is a part of a larger one that argues there are no theological grounds for refusing to bless civil unions. She goes on to say, "Blessing is an important concept in the biblical world. To be blessed by God means to receive God's favour in both protection of us and provision for us. At the beginning of creation, living creatures are blessed by God, including human beings, so that they may thrive and flourish. {Gen 1:22.28} We are created in the image of God and out of God's love we are to continue to live our lives in love and harmony with the whole of creation, and to share with God the fulfilment of what it means to be human and to live in love with all. By implication, God's favour lies with the whole of creation which is declared Good and continues under that same divine blessing.

This divine blessing is for the poor, the humble, the peacemaker, and the persecuted who receives God's favour-both now and in the age to come." It is blessing for our stewardship of the gift of life and the earth we inhabit.

In today's Gospel the crowd has been looking for Jesus. He has just fed them described earlier in John with the feeding of the 5000. Now they are hungry again. They find him on the other side of the sea. He figures out they are hungry again and challenges them not for food that sustains the moment but what really matters that is more important. To recognize and believe in the gift of life that has been given by God, amore enduring food that requires engagement, responsibility and action. More than the immediate. The message here is simple what we believe should shape how we live.

The practice of blessing is central to God's love for the whole of creation and on another occasion, we would have proceeded to bless the animals present.

May I suggest that if you have a pet bless your companion yourself and say thank you for the joy and hope shared.

In light of the pandemic reflect on how you may need to change your life in the days ahead to honour and care for the creation.

Amen