St. Francis Day 2026 Sermon
October 4, 2026
Trinity Episcopal Church
The Rev. Sarah D. Thomas

When you think of St. Francis, I'm guessing you picture a gentle friar in a brown robe, one hand outstretched with a little bird perched on his finger. And that's not wrong. St. Francis did feel a deep kinship with every creature. But he was much more than a peaceful friar who sang to birds.

He grew up in a wealthy family in the 1200s, with lots of friends and was known as the life of the party. He dreamed of becoming a knight and rode off to war, but he was held captive in prison for a year. When he was released he signed up to fight again, but a vision stopped him telling there was something new for him, and he turned instead to long months of solitude and prayer in nature. One day, while he was walking outside of town, he met a leper. Lepers had always repulsed him, but this time, while giving the man some money, he decided to kiss the leper's hand and this was a turning point for him. He was able to see this leper as his brother. And even as Christ himself. This began his journey of renouncing his wealth (in sometimes very public and dramatic ways), getting rid of all his possessions, and working to reform a church that had become corrupt. He wanted to call it back to the original teachings of Jesus. He founded the Franciscan order, and with his friend and follower Clare of Assisi, the Order of the Poor Clares.

Even though he lived in the early 13th century, he is a saint for our time. Writer Brian McLaren and Catholic activist Patrick Carolan go so far as to say it is time for a "Franciscan Renaissance." St. Francis' vision had 4 main parts: it was ecological, nonviolent, economic, and deeply interconnected.[1]

He saw humanity and the natural world as one family. When he prayed, he didn't pray *for* creation, he prayed *with* it and *through* it. Listen to his "Canticle of the Sun."

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…. Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather…. Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water.

Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Sister Water. We need that sense of kinship, that belonging with all created beings, more than ever.

St. Francis' vision was nonviolent, in contrast to the Christianity of his time that had drifted toward fear and domination. But early Christianity, as we can see in our reading from Acts this morning, began as a nonviolent peaceful movement of table fellowship, service, and love.
We need St. Francis' Christlike vision of nonviolence in our world and in ourselves.

[1] This whole section comes from https://cac.org/daily-meditations/its-time-for-a-franciscan-renaissance-2023-09-08/

His vision was economic – he saw the inequities of his time and he gave up his wealth and went to live beside the poor and invited others to do the same. In today's world, where the wealth is hoarded by a few, what might Francis ask of us? Today's Gospel story asks the same question when Jesus warns about greed and how it can sneak in and take over. St. Francis understood greed and saw it in himself. He prayed and worked to be freed of it. Not an easy thing in our world today that nurtures greed at every turn.

And Francis' vision was interconnected. He saw everyone as his sibling, even his opponents. He believed we are bound together in solidarity with every living thing.

As I read about St. Francis this week, I wondered how he was able to make such a shift in his life. He had a profound shift from one worldview to an entirely different one: from the worldview of the knight to the worldview of the gardener.[2] These ideas belong to writer and futurist Cassidy Steele Dale, who doesn't write about St. Francis, but his framework is helpful as a way in to see how Francis saw the world and how we might, too.

Dale thinks there are two worldviews very much in existence in the world today, two different lenses we look through that inform how we see everything: The worldview of the knight and the worldview of the gardener. He isn't saying there are only two kinds of people. And he isn't saying there are only two worldviews. But he believes that the knight and the gardener are the most helpful worldviews for explaining what is going on in our world. According to Dale, *knights* see themselves as part of a "great cosmos-spanning war between divine good and demonic evil." They believe their calling is to be part of "moral, spiritual, and political crusades … to defeat the forces of evil." God is seen as the "divine authority who requires … courageous, determined, moral champions." "For knights, " Dale writes, "the world, and the terrain of the individual human soul, is a battlefield, always at war."

"Gardeners see themselves as part of a great cosmic-spanning garden." They believe that their primary role is to "cultivate the garden" through preparing the soil, planting seeds, weeding – without expecting a weed-free world, and trusting God with the growth. To gardeners, God is the ground of being and "all Creation is involved in one great act of giving birth."

Sometimes I catch myself thinking as a knight – sorting people into good guys and bad guys, wanting to win, feeling combative or even holier than thou. And sometimes I catch myself thinking as a gardener – asking how a problem could be creatively solved in community, or wondering how God is already moving and how I might join in.

So just for a fun experiment, I want you to turn to someone next to you and for just a couple of minutes, share where you see the knight worldview playing out in our world, and where you see the garden worldview. You won't have much time to share, so just offer a few thoughts to each other.

We live in a moment when the knight is loud. We hear it in the rise of Christian Nationalism and in the rhetoric of our nation's highest officials, language that sounds like the crusades, the same

[2]https://knightandgardener.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/the-knight-and-the-gardener-by-cassidy-s-dale.pdf?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

God-of-battle invoked in Francis' own day. It doesn't help that the Bible is full of knight language: vanquishing enemies, putting on armor, God as a warrior. That is why we try here at Trinity, to be careful with militaristic language when we can. The knight is an old worldview and it is threaded throughout our sacred scripture. But so is the garden! The Bible begins in a garden. The Psalms and the Song of Songs are full of garden language. The prophet Isaiah dreams of deserts blooming and turning swords into plowshares. And the Gospels point to the true gardener that Francis spent his life imitating.

And so today I'm wondering, where would St. Francis be if he walked among us? What garden would he be tending? I think he would be somewhere walking side by side with people in a movement of kinship and peace and reforming change. He'd probably be on a walk that is happening right now. Today, a group of interfaith clergy and lay people connected to LA Sacred Resistance are walking 96 miles from the Adelanto ICE processing center in the high Mojave desert, all the way to the Metropolitan detention center in downtown LA. They are taking 8 days and walking about 15 miles a day in triple digit heat. Our own bishop Antonio joined the beginning of the pilgrimage. They are walking in protest of the conditions at the Adelanto center which are unacceptable: unsafe water, spoiled food, untrained staff, and an unresponsiveness to critical medical needs. Four people have died there this past year. They are walking to call attention to how far out they built this detention center to keep people far away out of sight and out of mind, away from family. I think St. Francis would be walking with these pilgrims in solidarity with his siblings who are being harmed and mistreated. Today is Day 6 out of 8. They woke up in La Verne. They will be stopping for lunch at Grace Episcopal Church in Glendora then they will walk on to St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Monrovia. They will keep walking until Tuesday when they will arrive in Downtown LA at a detention center. Please pray for them. They are walking in the Franciscan spirit of nonviolence, peace, and systemic change. They are tending the garden: a garden in which everyone must thrive, a garden of diversity and enough for everyone, a garden of creativity and reciprocity, and one that takes patience and trust.

I don't think knights and gardeners are that different in what we long for. We both want a world made right. The difference is how we believe it comes: by defeating an enemy, or by tending what God has planted together. Jesus came that we might have life, and have it abundantly. As Dale puts it, "There will always be many wars, but only one garden. And there only ever was. And there only ever will be."

So, in the spirit of St. Francis, "get to gardening."[3]

[3]https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/seeing-nature-as-a-gardener-part-2-with-cassidy-steele-dale/id1532685433?i=1000659060869