

**Care of Creation**  
**St. Paul's, Milford**  
**Sunday 18 October 2015: 8:00 and 9:30 (abridged)**

Every year the Church in NZ invites us to focus on the care of creation. It sets apart 2-3 days in which to do that. The days in question come on either side of our annual commemoration of St. Francis of Assisi (4 October). That day, of course, is often used to allow families to bring their pets to church for a blessing and we'll be doing that later in the morning. We should have done all this a couple of weeks ago, but it didn't quite fit with school holidays and so we took the liberty of changing things for our convenience.

You might ask what St. Francis had to do with all this. In fact, the answer is quite simple. He showed a great love of animals and indeed the whole of creation. He spoke to the animals; he referred to Brother Sun and Sister Moon. And he for his part was a man who was greatly loved by those around him. They followed him and flocked to join the brotherhood and sisterhood he founded. But there was another side to Francis – he was a hopeless administrator! No good at drawing up rosters or turning up on time. And in the end they had to get someone else in to look after the admin!

There's another story about Francis that I like. For the first few years of his life he enjoyed the social life; he was a bit of a lad around town. Shortly afterwards he went away as a soldier; he returned and continued with his social life, but then the penny dropped. He realised that he wasn't being very responsible. He needed order and a sense of discipline in his life.

And so he went into his local church, knelt down, and noticed that it was in ruins. In it he had a vision – a vision of Jesus. And from the crucifix he received a message, ‘Francis, go and rebuild my church’. Now in fact it was a call essentially to make the church as an institution more accessible to people and more faithful to God. And that’s why he formed his brotherhood; not a monastery looking into itself, but a body of friars looking out, going out to where the people were. But for a start, he assumed that when the voice was telling him to go and rebuild this church that it meant to fix up this church, to rebuild it.

And so he proceeded to do this. And he was a bit creative, shall we say. To finance the operation he got hold of some of his father’s things and sold them and gave the money to the church. Father was not at all impressed. There was a great scene with Francis, his father and the bishop. Francis was mortified by the whole performance and renounced his father and all earthly possessions and even the clothes he wore. The bishop in effect said, “Steady on Francis; you can’t go around like this! Put these things on”. And so he put on this light brown cloak which later became the inspiration for the typical Franciscan light brown habit with the white belt around the middle.

Today our collect is in fact the famous Prayer of St. Francis. Our first hymn, *All creatures of our God and King*, is based on St. Francis’ *Canticle of the Sun*. God is to be seen in all things; all things were made for the glory of God. That introduces us to his profound spirituality. You see there was more to Francis than a love of animals and a carefree, we might say reckless, abandon. This prayer touches at the very heart of the Christian gospel.

Let's take a look at today's readings; to see what they say to us. Short readings, all three of them. We don't need long extracts to convey simple truths.

The first spells out the teaching in the OT about the goodness of God, demonstrated by the wonders of the earth and all that's there for our use. A good land, flowing streams, springs and underground waters, valleys and hills, wheat and barley, vines, fig trees and pomegranates, olive trees and honey. It's a land where there are no shortages, where you will lack nothing; it's even a land where a certain amount of mining is permitted. You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you. I think it describes NZ. I can see the Waikato or Southland in it, Central Otago, the vineyards of Marlborough and the Wairarapa, the braided rivers of Canterbury.

There's a reflection of that in the psalm. About the dangers of excess; of a failure to treat this land with respect. 'The Lord turns rivers into deserts; fruitful land you make a salty waste.' But our human energies can be put to good uses, so that you 'turn desert into standing pools; dry land into springs of water'. We have the capacity to do good; to make wise use of creation. I like that closing verse: 'Let those who are wise ponder these things and consider the Lord's unfailing love.'

The Epistle introduces the idea of the partnership between man and God; the human and the divine. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose. So too man watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but it's only God who gives the growth. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. I've seen some episodes of *Country Calendar* over the

years. Time after time I've heard farmers say, 'Yes this is our farm, but it will be here after we've gone. We inherited this. But we are in fact stewards, trustees; it's ours to use for a time, but then we hand it on to others'.

Then there's that Gospel teaching. It's about the importance of earthly things, but it's also about their relative unimportance in the scheme of things. 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' You know, we can't take it with us. Use it while you're here, but keep in mind that these things will pass away, just like we will. We're here for a time. Let's use that time well.