

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Feast of St. Francis: October 15, 2023

Living the Gospel with St. Francis

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the day we celebrate St. Francis. "Here is our rule," Francis said— as simple and as impossible as it may have seemed: he shouted "Live by the Gospel!" Francis took the Gospel so literally that when a thief stole his hood, he made one of the brothers run after the thief calling, "Here, take this too!" offering his cloak.

There are many tales about St Francis. It is hard to know whether they are true or tales, but they do hold a good example of living the Gospel. In one famous story, Francis preached to hundreds of birds about being thankful to God for their wonderful clothes, for their independence and flight, and for God's care. The story tells us the birds stood still as he walked among them, only flying off when he said they could leave.

Francis was a man of action. Born in wealth and having been the life of the party in his youth, a soldier in his young adulthood and then beginning his own brotherhood. His simplicity of life extended to both ideas and deeds. If there was a simple way, no matter how impossible it seemed, Francis would take it.

One might ask how Francis came to change his life from one of wealth, parties and pranks, to an austere life in a monastery. What is often overlooked is that as a soldier for Assisi, he was quickly captured and spent about a year in prison. I

would imagine this stark captive reality is what sparked his contemplation on God and prepared him for a life of little means and servitude.

Once released, Francis returned to Assisi hailed as a hero, but unknown to his friends he had undergone a transformation in his outlook during his captivity. Although he was once again the life of the party, he was now questioning his reason for existence.

After much contemplation, including vivid dreams and mystic visions, he turned away from the pursuit of all worldly pleasures, sold all of his property and donated the money to the Church. And in the beginning the church rejected his offerings, but that did not stop him. He then began a lifelong passion of caring for society's castoffs: the sick and poor, including lepers.

In 1224, Francis went up onto a mountain and began a 40-day fast. During that time, he is said to have had a miraculous vision and received the marks of the nails and spear exactly as they appeared on the body of Jesus during his crucifixion.

After his death in 1226, Francis was declared a saint by Pope Gregory IX. For several centuries thereafter, his Franciscan order experienced continuous growth and is still active today caring for the poor, educating youth, and performing many other good deeds.

Eventually, as the brotherhood grew, its members traveled to other parts of Europe to preach, including France, Germany, Spain and England. A separate order for women was formed, now known as the Franciscan Nuns or Poor Clares. For those of you who are interested, there is a Franciscan Nunnery in

San Francisco, whose sisterhood attend my sponsoring church, Holy Innocents Episcopal Church

In many ways St. Francis' life mirrors that of Jesus Christ. Both were rather insignificant men who wandered around small villages preaching to whomever would listen. They didn't have any political power and they did not lead any armies into battle. What they did do, was love. Love unconditionally. Love creation, love humanity and most of all, love the creator God of all.

The unexpected way St. Francis changed the world was through his example. His revolutionary way of thinking is so radically simple that most of us overthink our way of being. We are so focused on our own needs that we miss the needs of others. Sometimes we don't love ourselves, and therefore can't love others. For Francis, love was not complicated. What an example! It is quite possible Francis was the Mr. Rogers of his time.

All you need to do to follow the Gospel is to live simply and show your joy to the world. When others see the beauty of a life united to God, they are immediately attracted to it. St. Francis never expected his little band of brothers to be of any significance. And yet today they are one of the largest religious orders in the world!

Francis believed that a life lived authentically, rooted in the Gospel, has more power than any king or earthly ruler.

Do you want to change the world? Don't try to become powerful according to earthly standards. Start simply by beginning with yourself and slowly influencing

those within your sphere of influence. Start to model unconditional love. Which just means making space for the other, the rest will come naturally.

The Gospel is preached most effectively, not by powerful organizations that reach to every corner of the globe, but by individuals passing it on to another person. In case you are wondering, I'm talking about you.

Yes, you. At our Diverse Voices concert all felt welcomed; at our Italian Extravaganza all felt welcomed; we can do this. Christ the Lord can, as a church, model the Gospel.

As the friar from Assisi often encouraged his followers:

***“Start by doing what's necessary;
then do what's possible;
and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”***

Amen