

It is said that when St. Francis could not find people to listen to his preaching, he preached to the birds and they listened. The 13th century book “The Little Flowers of St Francis” says that on one occasion he saw a great flock of birds who seemed to be attentive to him so he preached to them of God’s love for them and told them they must sing to show their gratitude and to praise God. The writer records that “While Francis said these words, all those birds began to open their beaks, and stretch out their necks, and spread their wings, and bend their heads reverently toward the earth, and with acts and songs, they showed that the holy father gave them great pleasure.” They then flew away in all directions as if they were taking the message far and wide.¹

I wonder whether that is really what Jesus had in mind when he said ““Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.”?”

This short gospel reading comes at the very end of Jesus’ ministry before the ascension. It is a bookend to the very beginning of his ministry when we are told that Jesus went into Galilee preaching the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:14,15). The direction to proclaim the good news to all creation is a continuation of Jesus ministry. We, his followers, are to continue his ministry.

What is the good news that we are to proclaim to all creation?

The second reading from Paul’s letter to the Romans gives us some clues.

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.

¹ <https://www.learnreligions.com/saint-francis-assisi-sermon-to-birds-124321>

This reminds me of a fairy tale where the whole kingdom has been cast under a terrible spell so that everything is grey and still, everything is asleep waiting for the prince to come, battle his way to the castle that lies in the very center and kiss the sleeping princess thus setting everything free from its bondage to sleep and the birds begin to sing again, the trees to grow and the whole kingdom to rejoice in the newfound joy and glory of the prince and princess.

This is an archetypal story.

But in Paul's telling of it, the prince is not some part of the psyche or a visitor from a far distant planet, no the prince is the children of God. That's you and me my friends.

The sons and daughters of God are the ones who bring hope that creation itself will be freed from the law of entropy and will be free to enjoy its own true nature. The redemption of creation itself is tied up in our redemption.

That's a huge claim. That's well beyond ideas of good stewardship and living lightly on the earth. This is a cosmic story that we can only begin to grasp. I have been thinking recently that this narrative of God's love and creation, of sin and redemption is like a complex multi-dimensional weaving or quilt of many, many colors and many layers, even many dimensions. We see one part of it and think that that is it, but it is not... it is just a little part and if we remain open to the Spirit of God the picture tips a little and we realize there's a whole other part that we had not even glimpsed before. Which makes it difficult to say anything conclusive about the reign of God.

But we won't let that hold us back! Because it is through language that we come to see and to grasp the little parts that we can grasp. Yet we must always have humility, and not think that the face of God which we see is the only face. There is always more.

Back to the archetypal story.

You and I, people of God, are the ones who get to kiss the sleeping princess. In our proclamation of the gospel to the whole of creation, we participate in the very redemption of creation, we participate in the great work which God is doing to bring the kingdom out of the darkness of the evil spell and into the glorious light of the new day, the coming reign of God when every color will be glorious and every bird will sing for ever.

So the good news is that in Christ we are set free from all the things that separate us from God; in Christ all creation comes into being and in Christ all things will be renewed, brought into balance and made whole. Our work is to participate in God's plan of redemption. Our work is to heal and make whole. Our work is to bring the consciousness of God's love to everything we think, say and do.

This is the work of a lifetime because we have all learned how to be critical, how to notice what's wrong with people and things, and how to ignore things that don't contribute to our ambition to live as comfortably as possible. Now we get to transform our consciousness so that we notice what's right and rejoice in it, we notice what is oppressive and wrong and do everything we can to change it. This is not something we have to do on our own. Just as the prince cutting through the creepers and overgrown brush which surrounds the castle often has a supernatural helper, so we too have a helper – the greatest “supernatural” helper ever – the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit works with us to change the way we see things; to teach us not to be tribal in our thinking but to embrace all beings. And as we change the way we *see* things we also get to change the way we *do* things. This is the living lightly on the planet bit – an internal change in consciousness is never complete unless it also transforms the way we live. We all have a small part of the planet that we inhabit; how will we care for it so that it too knows the joy of its own true nature? Does the way you live in your home and neighborhood bring life and connection?

For that is how we kiss the princess. By living the reign of God in our own setting, in our own backyards. By planting plants that sustain the life of bees and other pollinators, by encouraging the microbes in the soil through mulching and avoiding any kind of chemical; by connecting with our neighbors both human and non-human; by watching out for passing birds or skunks or possums. By radiating the love of God in every moment, even when we watch the news.

So when you get up in the morning and think about your day, here is a new prayer for you:

“How shall I kiss the princess today?”