

Luke 12:22-32

Good morning, St Bens. It is so nice to be back with you today.

Reverend Caro has chosen 3 wonderful readings for today as we celebrate the feast of St Francis. Last time we were here it was the feast of St Benedict's and now St Francis – what a lovely opportunity to be with this community that clearly seeks to live inspired by both of these saints.

I have to say something about this first reading from Job. This is chapter 39 – near the end of this story. Job has been making his case to God that he is utterly righteous therefore it was not just of God to destroy – well everything – all his children, his wife, and his animals. But this passage is God giving it back to Job – he is basically saying oh you are so knowledgeable so you understand all these things like when the deer will give birth and so on and on. God goes on to challenge Job “Will you condemn me that you may be justified?” But Job repents and steps it back by apologizing for questioning God. He is in the end restored with twice as much as before. Sadly, his first wife and children don't come out as well.

If you have not read Job, I encourage you to. It is an interesting and challenging story of suffering and loss.

But what really captured my attention today is this line at the end of the gospel reading from Luke:

It is God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

What is this kingdom that God wants to give us? When you close your eyes do you see this kingdom? Do you know in your heart what it is that Jesus repeatedly speaks of?

And is the kingdom the same today as what it was when he said these words?

Well, we know what St. Francis vision of the kingdom was. He sought a world completely in keeping with this gospel passage in Luke. He didn't worry about what he ate or what he wore. He removed his fine clothes and put on a burlap sack and gave away his belongings and inheritance and relied on God to provide for him. He is the epitome of downward mobility. The men and women who followed him embraced poverty and lived free of possessions and all the obligations that come with worldly accumulation.

He made family with the creatures large and small calling them brother and sister. St Francis saw the sacred in creation the most tangible way. His reverence for the beauty of nature influenced all of Europe ushering in a new level of art realism that continues to be revered today.

I think the kingdom of God that St. Francis imagined is very much in line with this stunning 2nd reading. This moving poem - To Live is to Love by Ernesto Cardenal. This cherished poet was a Nicaraguan priest who got in trouble with the church for supporting the Sandanista revolution which overthrew an evil authoritarian dictator. In this poem he speaks to the relationship

between God and creation calling the creatures God's love letter to us. This line particularly blew me away:

"All of nature burns with love created through love to light love in us."

For the Jesuit priest Father Greg Boyle, the founder of Homeboy Industries and author of 3 New York Times best-selling books has a very distinct and clear idea of the kingdom of God. He has claimed the kingdom as the KINDOM – by taking out the g he has taken away any sense of a hierarchy or patriarchy and made it a lateral family of kindred souls. His mission has always been to awaken compassion through the heartbreaking stories he tells. If you have not read his books – you are missing out on a real treat – he will make you laugh and then cry over and over. His stories open our hearts especially for those society demonizes – gang members, allowing for a truth path to kinship. He seeks to bring together the human family saying over and over "there is no us and them, just us."

Jesus tells us to consider the ravens and lilies who do not toil but have their needs met by God. The passage just before this is of the rich many building more barns to store up his huge harvest. He clings to his wealth – he does not share but rather accumulates - just as the wealthiest of society do today. The few hoard what they can and the rest struggle to make ends meet. This is exactly what Jesus does not want us to do.

So, Jesus asks us to consider the ravens who neither sow nor reap and the lilies who neither toil nor spin. Scholarship says that the ravens symbolize the men who traditionally reap, and sow and the lilies are the women who spin making the necessary cloth for the family. He says that God knows that we need these things but that we must strive for the kingdom not accumulating and these things will be provided.

What is the kingdom of God for you? Is it a place of no worries? A place where all our needs are met without toil? Do we just need to have faith for this God to provide all that we need?

St Francis and his beloved Clare refused to participate in the power structures of their day. Like Jesus they opted out of the ambition game. The get ahead and succeed story. They said no to the power structures. By their choices they were deconstructing the systems of domination. Church today can do this. It can stand in contrast to the obsessive consumerism and oppressive power structures. It can raise up the needs of the marginalized and support the least. It can lead in care for the earth as you all are doing so well here. There is a nascent movement of voices rising up against the structures of domination and the church needs to participate.

For me the kingdom of God is when the lions and lambs lay down together. When the powers of domination are set free to live in balance with the least. When the world is truly just and all of creation lives with dignity and respect.

We need to imagine this kingdom into existence. We need to commit to Jesus's original plan where there is an appreciation of our interconnectedness. Where we do not hoard but share and where we live in peace and kindness.

I believe in this better world that God wants us to have. Maybe the darkness and chaos of this time we are in is the birthing pains that will bring into existence the kingdom of God. Maybe we can consider living free of worry, united to Grace, and aware of the inner kingdom of God where the peace that passes all understanding exists; and from this place be agents of change. And we give thanks for St Francis and the vision of the kingdom he left for the world. Amen.