
Taking Jesus Seriously

**An Evensong Meditation by Clayton Harrington
The Feast of St. Francis**

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

On this Sunday we remember St. Francis of Assisi. Particularly, we remember St. Francis' love of animals and creation. It is well known that he referred to animals and other aspects of creation as "brother" and "sister." He preached in the forest to birds about being thankful to God and he brokered a deal between a violent, hungry wolf and the angry town that it had been attacking. Francis understood that God's grace and love extends not just to humanity, but to all of creation. That is, of course, why we bless pets on St. Francis Sunday.

But we remember St. Francis for more than just his love of nature. We remember him for his devotion to a life of poverty and his sharing in the suffering of Christ.

St. Francis was born to a wealthy family and lived the early part of his life in wealth and revelry. However, after a period of sickness and an encounter with a beggar, a leper, and a vision from Christ, he decided to renounce all of his wealth and to preach the gospel of Christ to all people. He gave up everything. And it cost him. His father did not approve of his choice to renounce his wealth. People mocked him on the streets. Even the Pope was hesitant to grant him and his followers permission to preach and to form an official order. But Francis was committed to his rule: "To follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps."^[1]

In his conversion experience, Francis could confidently say the words of Paul from today's epistle: "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." The things of the world that had once brought Francis satisfaction and meaning no longer did so. And the world just didn't quite understand Francis and his poverty.

But Francis was faithful to the call of God on his life - "To follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps."

For Francis, that was living in poverty and being a wandering preacher. But what does that look like for us? What does it look like to have the world crucified to us and for us to be crucified to the world? I think it starts with taking Jesus seriously. Jesus said a lot of things in the Gospels that, if we are honest, can make us really uncomfortable. I've had the privilege of leading a Bible Study at the Cathedral Towers for the past few months in which we have walked through a large portion of the Gospel of Luke. And as I have prepared and as we have discussed these texts, I've had to be honest with myself (and with those gathered together) that what Jesus says and asks of his followers can make me uncomfortable. Sometimes it's because I don't entirely get what Jesus is suggesting, like the parable of the Shrewd Servant. But mostly, it's because Jesus often has harsh words for me. Well, not me exactly, but for the people like me in the Gospel narratives.

He criticizes the Pharisees because even though they are devoted to God they often fail to do the self-reflective work that is necessary as a believer. He rebukes the disciples in their quickness to judge people who don't immediately think the same way they do. And he rebukes those who have what they need in this life, but constantly want more... "stuff." If you can

read through the Gospels without feeling even slightly uncomfortable, you're either a saint, like Francis, or you're not reading them close enough.

But I believe these feelings of discomfort are not bad, but are good. They are the proddings of the Holy Spirit to listen closely to the teachings of Jesus. They call us to sit down and think about where we are on our walk with Christ and where we want to be. They call us to re-orient our lives around Christ and the Kingdom of God—to set God at the center instead of ourselves. This is not easy work, friends. The world calls to us louder and louder every day.

But the message of the Gospel isn't that we must work ourselves into being "good" people. No—it's about opening ourselves up to the radical and transforming love of God, just as Francis did, and then taking that love into the world "to do the work that God has given *us* to do."

Amen.

[\[1\] https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Francis-of-Assisi](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Francis-of-Assisi)