

Sermon for Sunday, October 2, 2016
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
The Very Rev. Canon Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley

Today we celebrate
one of the best known saints
in the Christian tradition,
St Francis of Assisi.

St Francis
is best known
as the patron saint
of animals, and
related to that
the environment,
though he is also the patron saint of merchants, stowaways, tapestry workers, Cub
Scouts, Italy, and San Francisco.

But today
we remember him best
as the patron signet of animals and the environment.
Though it's not what
you would have immediately thought of
had you met him
back in the twelfth century
when he was a young man.

Francis
was one of seven children
of a well off merchant,
and grew up
with all the luxury
money could buy.
After military service, illness, and a series of visions,
Francis renounced his family and his wealth
and devoted himself to a life
of preaching and poverty,
and quickly attracted a number of followers,
the beginning of his
religious

order.

And one of the hallmarks of his preaching
was his emphasis on creation
as God's good and beautiful gift.

But it wasn't something
that Francis invented.
That focus on creation as God's good gift
has its roots in Scripture,
all the back to the very first chapter of the bible,
Genesis chapter 1.
So often when we talk about the creation story
we get sidetracked into an argument
about creation and evolution.
But it seems to me
that Genesis chapter 1
is not so much about how the world was created
as that behind it all
was God,
and that creation
is good.

And then there's Jesus.
So often
when his disciples are struggling
he turns to nature
for inspiration.
So he invites us to consider sparrows
and lilies of the field
and today
a mustard seed.

If you've ever done any Indian cooking
you'll know what a mustard seed looks like,
small, either black or yellowish-tan.
In metric terms,
it's between one and two millimeters in size.
In other words,
it's smaller than a raisin
and bigger than

a grain of sand,
smaller than a sunflower seed
but bigger than a poppy seed.

In other words
it's not minuscule, but pretty small.
And Jesus says to his disciples
if you had just the tiniest bit of faith,
amazing things could happen!

But they're not convinced.
Because all they know
is how uncertain they feel.

Jesus has been telling stories,
story after story after story.
About a lost sheep and a lost coin and two lost boys
and the generous,
extravagant
welcome of God.
About debts wiped out
and trust in God rather than money
and the testimony
of someone come back from the dead.

And about forgiving, about forgiving
again
and again
and again
and again
and again
and again.
and again.

And it all sounds great in theory
but when it comes to putting it into practice,
the disciples
just find it all too hard.
They want to be certain,
but they just can't quite

believe
that it will all
work.

“Help us,” they say, “Help us
believe.”

“All you need,” says Jesus,
“all you need
is a tiny
tiny speck of faith.
That
is enough.”

Recently I’ve been reading a book by Brené Brown,
who did one of the ten most popular TED talks ever.
One of the things she argues
is that the opposite of scarcity
is not plenty.
The opposite of scarcity
is
enough.
Enough.

And that’s what Jesus is saying.
We don’t need to be
great saints
with vast stores of faith.
We just need to have a little -
and that little
will be enough.

Even St Francis
didn’t begin by planning to create
a religious order
that would travel across the world
and through the centuries.
He began
by looking around him,
seeing some needs

and doing what he could.
It was enough.

And that's the faith
that we need to follow Jesus.
Not a truckload;
just a tiny grain.
Not absolute certainty,
just the willingness
to take the first step
in following Christ.
And after that first step,
another
and another
and another.
And it will be
enough.

Jesus says,
"Come follow me.
Come."