

Homily for October 4, 2026: Stewardship of Creation

Canticle of the Creatures by St Francis of Assisi

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing.

To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and

No human is worthy to mention Your name.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,

Who is the day and through whom You give us light.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;

and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.

*[Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.]

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

*omitted here

Each year, on this day, we remember St Francis. He wrote The Canticle of the Creatures, that I just read, in 1225 more than 800 years ago. In this poem, St Francis recognized the divine presence in all living things, and he equated them with us – as if they were our siblings. He saw the whole of Creation as something to give thanks to God for, and to love and cherish. As for us, we are just one part of it.

We all know that, in the centuries following St Francis, attitudes were different. People came to think of the environment as a resource to serve our purposes. Even today, some Christians will still quote Genesis chapter 1 where it states that we are given dominion over everything as a callous reason to propose that, when it's used up, Jesus will return and create a new heaven and a new earth. But most of us, I believe, find this kind of self-centered thinking is at odds with how God has called us to live in the world and especially when we acknowledge how much harm has been done to the environment.

In 2015 Pope Francis wrote a powerful encyclical on the environment and introduced the term: **integral ecology** – meaning, how we treat our environment is connected to how we treat our neighbors. Caring for creation is to care for the poor and to bring economic justice to those whose lives and livelihoods have been harmed. Perhaps prompted by this encyclical, the Connecticut Delegation to the National Convention that year proposed an addition to the Baptismal Covenant! This was a bold initiative.

The Baptismal Covenant describes what we believe and how we are called to live as followers of Jesus. It is the bedrock statement of our faith. It ends with

five questions: Will you seek to serve Christ in all persons, strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of all human beings, and so forth. Our Bishops at that time proposed this sixth question:

Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation?

The motion failed. It was reintroduced for several subsequent years, but it's never passed. Finally, in 2024 it was referred to the Committee working on revisions to the BCP. But in 2018, the Bishops of Connecticut authorized churches in our diocese to include this sixth question in the Baptismal Covenant. I didn't know this history, but I'm sure we remember that both Bishop Gordon and Rev Linda have included this when we have reaffirmed our Baptismal Covenant here.

Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation?

And we all happily respond **I will with God's help.**

Promising to protect AND restore the integrity of all creation is a daunting challenge! This means creation care, I prefer environmental stewardship, becomes part of the foundation of our faith not just an option on a list of programs and activities or something to only think about during this particular season.

Living into this new Baptismal vow challenges our thinking about how we live in the world, our lifestyle choices and priorities. It might lead us to consider some difficult changes!

I am reading a book by Donn Mitchell called Eleanor Roosevelt's Nightly Prayer. Eleanor was a dedicated Episcopalian. She prayed the St. Francis prayer often. "Lord make me an instrument of thy peace." She prayed this every day, apparently, when drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the UN.

But her nightly prayer includes the line: **Keep us at tasks too hard for us so we may be driven to Thee for strength.** I don't know about you, but I don't pray for hard tasks – quite the opposite!

But trying to honestly live out this new Baptismal promise might lead us to take on hard tasks that we will need God's strength for.

As I reflected on today's readings, I hoped that I would find something in them to help us as we reflect on our stewardship.

In the passage from Isaiah, the Vineyard is an obvious metaphor for the people of Israel. God loved His chosen people. He had brought them into the promised, beautiful land and given them His laws to guide their lives: how to live and prosper, how to treat their neighbors, especially those less fortunate, and also, how to manage the land and their animals. Lots and lots on this in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy – not exactly light reading but very interesting! But the people had forgotten all this, they had even begun worshipping other idols. They were only interested in living for themselves - selfish and uncaring. Isaiah says their fruit was not the fruit of loving kindness, peace and justice, it was rotten – perhaps their harvests were literally rotten too, from pollution and bad management.

They had forgotten that all they had ,had come from God, it wasn't their land. They had forgotten who was truly in charge. And they had forgotten that what God gives, He can take away again! They paid a high price for not being in the right relationship with God because they were soon to be overrun by Assyria and few survived.

The reading from Matthew finds Jesus, once again, arguing with the Chief Priests and Pharisees. And He really gets them to show their true colors this time by luring them right into a trap with His own version of the vineyard story. The Pharisees and Chief Priests with self-righteous, prideful behavior, thought were in charge of the kingdom; and, worse yet, they were complicit with the Romans in keeping the poor Jews in their place. Not much good fruit here either! Jesus was especially angry because, despite all their study and supposed expert knowledge of the scriptures, they couldn't see God in Jesus. So, God took the leadership of His Kingdom away from them and finally, it was given to complete outsiders.

Many scholars suggest that Jesus hadn't intended to start a whole new religion. He hoped to transform what already existed. But the Chief Priests and Pharisees were not going to change their ways.

Now, allegedly, whenever St Francis prayed or read scripture, he would ask two simple questions: Who is God and Who am I? Let us do this.

Who is God (on this day, in this place)?

Through these passages we are reminded that He is the one whose love for all people is truly an infinite resource, never used up or corrupted. Whose willingness to forgive never runs out, no matter how awful we are. The

Psalmist, who had to be one of the survivors after Assyria conquered Israel, asks God to look down from heaven and tend his vine and preserve what his right hand had planted. And He did, eventually. Through Jesus, as we celebrate every Sunday, God rebuilt the relationship that He wants with His people, with all people. We can see the continuous generosity and caring of God all around in nature and in our own lives.

Who am I? Jesus is teaching us that we are now the tenants in this Kingdom but only the tenants. All we have is through His grace and we are entrusted to care for it well and not take it for granted. It only took a few years for the tenants in Jesus' vineyard story to forget. It's been two thousand years for us! It would be understandable if we thought that we worked hard for all we have and it belongs to us.

What stops us is our faith, the assurance that, one day, the true owner will return. Ultimately that's what these passages are about – keeping the faith - believing God is with us, He did not leave **us** alone in the vineyard. Paul writes of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord.

And trusting in the grace of His Holy Spirit, we can be equipped and strengthened to take on hard tasks and produce the fruit that He wants including, I hope: **repentance** for our times of selfishness, **courage** to loosen our grip so we can share more, **willingness** to fight for peace and justice and, finally, **strength** to do more to protect God's creation. Hard tasks!

Eleanor Roosevelt rejected any attempt to label her as “spiritual”. She said she was religious! She regularly attended an episcopal church, wherever she was living. She said that she received her inspiration through the Episcopal

liturgy and Bible readings. She believed that our traditional way for discerning the way forward through reading scripture, reasoning and praying together was the best way.

But it was also very important to her to be in a community with shared values – like this (us at Trinity). Her community was a support for her.

So, in our community here, I am hoping that we will find time to put our heads together and think about ways that we might be more active in creation care and then, support each other in our efforts. Through our outreach, both individually and as a church, we already do a lot to help our neighbors, both near and far. What else might God be calling us to do?

On the reverse of your bulletin is a prayer to carry home with you and to use often. It's from our web page, in the section on the Season of Creation. Also, don't forget the laminated Celtic version of the Lord's Prayer. I hope you have found that helpful. There are more copies at the back if you don't have one.

I want to close with a shortened version of Eleanor's prayer.

Our Father, who has set a restlessness in our hearts and made us all seekers after that which we can never fully find, forbid us to be satisfied with what we make of life. Draw us from base content and set our eyes on far-off goals. Keep us at tasks too hard for us that we may be driven to thee for strength. Deliver us from fretfulness and self-pitying; make us sure of the good we cannot see and of the hidden good in the world. Open our eyes to the simple beauty all around us. Save us from ourselves and show us a vision of a world made new. May the spirit of peace and illumination so enlighten our minds that all life shall glow with new meaning and new purpose: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen