

"At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, God of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, God, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Creator... 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest..'"

Massey Shepherd, the godfather of the modern Book of Common Prayer, a saintly man, and a fellow with a wry sense of humor, was charged with writing the brief biography of St. Francis for the Episcopal guide to saint's days. In the bio, he wrote, "Of all the saints, Francis is perhaps the most popular and admired but probably the least imitated." I hope you can hear Dr. Shepherd's smile come through for he was surely on to something. Perhaps only St. Benedict, who lived 500 years earlier, had a comparable influence on shaping our faith, our world and our thinking.

This morning we have a St. Francis figure on the altar that Julie Lear loaned us; it's particularly lovely, and I know from my own travels that there are few places you can go where you might not find a St. Francis sculpture placed in a garden or home. We all recognize Francis but just exactly who is he to us? Francis had a reputation for his ability to speak to animals; it's important to know this wasn't a magic practice but in fact, a sign of the extraordinary humility of Francis and his love for all of God's creation. Only those who pause and listen can gain the reward of talking with the animals. Go into the forest and sit in quiet; in no time you will see and hear many of your fellow creatures. As you can hear in the lessons today, God in Francis called on us to love all of creation, not just humanity, not just ourselves.

Francis was also thought to have said something like this: "preach love wherever you go and if necessary, use words." I don't know if he in fact said this, but the expression perfectly captures his attitude towards creation—that the beginning of love is the practice of

sharing love, not just talking about love. We know that Francis, from a very early age, practiced a kind of holy poverty that would be difficult to emulate. But his influence on our souls with respect to the hot pursuit of goods and money is profound—from Francis came the reminder that the pursuit of wealth only brings death to the soul, not love to the heart. The thinking of Francis shows up even in our very secular world—many a worldly writer would say the same, that the attachment to things is nothing but an anchor dragging on our soul; choose humility and generosity and you will find true love.

A couple of nights ago, as I woke in the night, I saw the moon was casting three fine strands of light across our bedroom, where all three fell on Gus our retriever. Every night for nearly five years, he has slept next to me on the floor in his bed, silently joining us in an unspoken communion of spirit. I took those three strands of light to be God's thankful blessing on Gus, reminding me of all his pet skills, listening, caring, loving and forgiving, all skills that I

fervently wish I could master as well as he does. So, thank you Francis for reminding us of our place in the world, not in charge of creation but responsible for it, and that we should walk shoulder to shoulder with all creation. Where indeed would we be without the Creation's embrace? Amen.

The Rev. Jeff Bullock