

**A Sermon for the 17th Sunday after Pentecost
October 5, 2025**



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Click Here for today's Readings:

[Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

- First Lesson: Galatians 6: 14-18
- Psalm 148: 7-14
- Second Reading: Canticle of the Creatures by Francis of Assisi
- Gospel: Matthew 11:25-30

Jesus Thanked his Father God, the Lord of Creation, for hiding these things from the wise and revealed them to little children.

Why does Jesus ask this? Is it like when he eats with sinners and tax collectors, reminding us that it is the sick who need a doctor, not the well? Or is it more like Clarence Odbody, George Bailey's wingless guardian angel in *It's a Wonderful Life*—bumbling and naïve, yet with the simple, trusting faith of a child? Do the wise seek to over analyze the message or reject that message as beneath their dignity, but a child's trusting nature accepts without question?

Like many of things of God, the Truth is that we see only in part. Each of these examples is only a glimpse, like seeing through a glass darkly, or like Plato's parable—grasping only the trunk, tusk, or leg without knowing the whole elephant. And perhaps it's fitting to slip in an animal reference early in a sermon on St. Francis.

And speaking of St. Francis, consider the blessings we will be bestowing on our beloved pets. This too is an example of simple, trusting faith. Think about how easily puppies and kittens' approach new people in their environment. No pretense, no weariness, receptive to any contact.

Many in this congregation have adopted or stumbled into raising a pup or nursing a newborn kitten. In those relationships, animals become teachers: not beneath us, but beside us—showing us presence, simplicity, and praise, both giving and receiving. How does that represent our relationship with the divine?

How can the example of St Francis inform our understanding of this relationship?

Perhaps the answer is that Francis never stopped at the personal bond alone. He saw in every creature—from the smallest sparrow to the blazing sun—a reflection of God's glory. Where we might see only a pet at our feet or a bird in the sky, Francis heard a choir rehearsing a hymn.

If our pets and companions teach us trust and presence, Psalm 148 reminds us that the whole universe is already singing. It calls on sea monsters and fire, hail and snow, mountains and trees, wild animals and cattle, creeping things and flying birds, all to lift their voices in praise. It is as if the psalmist is conducting a cosmic choir, each creature with its part to sing.

Francis of Assisi heard that same music. In his Canticle of the Creatures, he gave names to the choir members: Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Fire, Sister Water. He didn't see creation as background scenery but as family—siblings in God's household, each of us, not soloists, but invited as a voice in a vast chorus of praise.

And here's the wonder: when we bless our animals today, we are not only thanking God for their companionship. We need to recognize them as fellow choristers in this great hymn of creation. Their bark, their purr, their song, their silence—all of it is part of the liturgy of the world.

There is a story in St. Francis' life about how one morning, as he and his companions walked the dusty road outside of a nearby town, they came upon a great flock of birds gathered in the fields. Instead of passing by, Francis stopped. He stepped into their midst, lifted his face to the sky, and began to speak to them as though they were his brothers and sisters.

"Little birds," he said, "you owe much to God your Creator, who has given you feathers for clothing, wings for flight, and the freedom of the open sky. Praise Him, then, and love Him always."

The story goes that the birds did not scatter. They stayed, wings outstretched, necks craned, as if they were listening. Some even circled above him, singing as he sang. When Francis finished, he blessed them with the sign of the cross, and only then did they take flight—an airborne choir, carrying his blessing into the heavens.

If Francis could hear the gospel in the song of sparrows, perhaps we too can learn to listen—to the voices of creation, to the wisdom of the wild, and to the gentle music of God's love all around us.

What lesson might we hear creation whisper if we listened?

As the seasons are changing, let me encourage you to spend a few minutes this week observing God's creation, maybe just one particular plant or animal. Ask yourself, 'What is God teaching me through it's being?'

But if creation is already singing, and if Francis could hear the gospel in the song of sparrows, what does that mean for us? Jesus gives us the answer in today's Gospel: "*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*" The song of creation is not meant to weigh us down—it is meant to lift us up. The same Christ who calls the birds to sing also calls us to lay down our burdens and take up his yoke.

Paul, in Galatians, says, "*I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body.*" These are not just wounds—they are signs of belonging, the visible cost of love, the embodied evidence of a life yoked to Christ. Francis bore those marks too—not only in the physical ailments that appeared late in his life, but in the daily scars of choosing poverty, humility, and love. His life was marked by surrender, and those marks became his testimony.

One of the most powerful moments came early in his conversion, when Francis stood before the bishop and his wealthy father. In a dramatic act, he removed every stitch of clothing, laying down the trappings of wealth and privilege, and declared that from now on he had only one Father—God in heaven. Naked in the square, he clothed himself in poverty, and in doing so, he found freedom.

That act was not about shame, but about liberation. Francis discovered that when we let go of what weighs us down—possessions, pride, status—we make room to take on Christ's yoke, which is easy and light. And so, the question comes to us: what are we willing to lay down for Christ? What burdens, what false securities, what heavy garments might we strip away so that we can walk more freely with him?

Jesus says, "*Take my yoke upon you... and you will find rest for your souls.*" A yoke is not a punishment—it is a partnership. A yoke is always built for two. It is the gift of

walking in rhythm with the One who knows our limits and loves us still. A well-fitted yoke does not chafe or crush; it distributes the weight so that the burden is shared. That is what Christ offers us: not freedom from all responsibility, but freedom from carrying it alone.

And this is where the hymn we sang before the Gospel becomes more than melody.

“’Tis a gift to be simple, ’tis a gift to be free, ’tis a gift to come down where we ought to be.” Simplicity is not the absence of burden—it is the presence of Christ in the burden. It is the right fit. The shared weight. The joy of finding ourselves, as the hymn says, “in the place just right.”

Francis knew this. He gave up everything so that he could walk yoked to Christ, and in that surrender, he found joy. His whole life became a hymn of simplicity.

But let us be clear: simplicity is not the same as scarcity. Francis did not embrace poverty because he despised the world, but because he loved it too much to cling to it. Simplicity is not about having nothing—it is about seeing clearly. It is about humility, about knowing who we are and who we are not. And it is about joy, the joy that comes when we are free to delight in God’s gifts without being enslaved by them.

This is the spirit of the *Prayer of St. Francis*: *“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith.”* That prayer is not a plea for less, but for more—for more clarity of purpose, more humility in service, more joy in giving ourselves away.

And this is the heart of Jesus’s invitation. He says, *“I am meek and lowly in heart.”* His strength was never his own; it was always God’s. His meekness was not weakness, but power under control, rooted in trust. His lowliness was not humiliation, but the freedom to serve without fear. To take his yoke is to learn that same rhythm of humility and joy, to discover that true strength comes not from grasping, but from surrender.

Sisters and brothers, the way of Francis and the way of Christ is not only about personal devotion—it is about bearing one another’s burdens. Paul reminds us that the marks of Christ are signs of belonging, and Francis showed us that those marks can be carried with joy when they are carried in love. To follow in their steps is to take seriously the call to care for God’s creation, to lift up the weary, to walk gently with the earth and with each other.

This is our challenge: to see creation not as a resource to be used, but as a neighbor to be cherished. To recognize that the burdens of the world—pollution, neglect, exploitation—are not someone else’s problem, but ours to share. And to believe that by carrying those burdens together, we can transform the world into something more like the kingdom of God.

And so today, as we bless the animals, we remember the words of Jesus: *“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”* That promise is not only for us, but for all of God’s creatures. For the pets who comfort us, for the animals who labor beside us, for the wild ones who remind us of God’s freedom.

“May this gentle yoke bring rest to your paws, wings, and hearts. May you, who teach us simplicity and trust, know God’s safeguarding love.”

When we lay our hands in blessing, we declare that rest and renewal are God's gift to every living thing. We bless them as companions, as teachers, as fellow choristers in the hymn of creation. And we bless ourselves, too, that we might walk more lightly, live more simply, and love more deeply.

May we, like Francis, become instruments of peace. May we, like Christ, learn the strength of meekness and the joy of humility. And may we, with all creation, find our place in the great chorus of praise.

Amen.