

Sermon
St. Francis
Blessing of the Pets
St. Andrew's, Methuen
October 4, 2020
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Genesis 2:18-25
Psalm 148:7-14
Revelation 5:11-14
Matthew 6:25-34

In 2012 my son flew his dog Charlie, a lab-mix with a cute underbite, from Chapel Hill to where I picked him up at midnight at Logan in the American Airlines cargo section. Charlie became a central member of our pack and my constant companion: he'd sit with me in my study, as I studied, prayed and wrote my sermons. Occasionally, he'd race downstairs to make sure the postman or FedEx person didn't think about breaking into our home.

This past July, mostly without warning, Charlie just fell out. I rushed him to the vet, but there was nothing to be done as Charlie was dying from a tumor and blood around the heart. Stephanie, Duncan, Jax and I gathered around Charlie and laid hands on him as he returned to his God and Master.

His ashes sit in a bamboo box on the altar-table which he used to lie on his bed.

This is an ordinary story. We all experience death in a pet, parent, spouse, child, or friend—and one day we will experience it ourselves. It is part of the cycle of life we remember every Lent when ashes are put on our foreheads and we hear the words, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” Once a year this helps us wake up out of our denial of death.

In Genesis 2 we see that the first human being, the Adam, is a compound creature: The Adam is made of both dust and the breath of God. In Genesis 1, a very different creation story, we see that human being—male and female—is created out of nothingness and the Word of God.

Genesis 3, unfortunately, tells the parable of what happens when Adam and Eve lose touch with the Divine side of their nature and imagine they are not enough and therefore ripe for the devil’s picking. When they forget their Divine nature, their nakedness, their dust-nature, causes them shame.

Our pets are not ashamed of their bodies and how they function because they never lose consciousness of the Divine Breath within them. But **we** have lost that awareness and therefore fall into all kinds of mental suffering Jesus calls “worry” that we try to deny and cover up.

But here we are in the middle of a pandemic with over 210,000 Americans dead and with the president and first lady having Covid-19, we find it much harder to run from the fact that we are dust and to dust we shall return.

So we our worry grows. We worry about what happened in the past, we worry about what is happening in the present, and we most definitely worry about what will happen in the future. Worry is as natural as breathing.

So, what in the world do we make of Jesus telling us five times not to worry? "Do not worry about your life... can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing, do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear...do not worry about tomorrow...."

If our primary understanding of who we are is that we are dust, then protecting at all costs my fragile, temporary life is perfectly reasonable. In this state we can't help but fear the stranger and to divide our world into "us versus them", "my white skin against their dark skin".

Therefore, in love and mercy, the Word who is God, takes on a human body of dust to save us from ourselves by restoring in us the awareness that our beginning and end are creatures of the Word and Breath of God.

As Paul tells us in Galatians:

I have been crucified with Christ; ²⁰ and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

We are one with Christ so that instead of living as scared dust, we live as sacred beings of Spirit—as little Christs.

Every morning we wake up into the awareness of our dust nature: our back hurts, our conscience is troubled, we worry about our finances, our country, and Covid-19, on and on, until we are a right proper mess of worry before we've even had breakfast.

Therefore, the moment we wake up we need to reclaim who we really are in our deepest and truest self. We do this by turning our attention to who God is: God is Life, God is Love, God is Spirit, God is the Divine Mind, God holds us each in eternity and in love.

In my experience it does little good to drag all my worries to God because in that encounter I end up focusing more on the dust than on the

divinity. What we must do is turn from thinking about them and meditate on who God is and who we are in God.

As Jesus says, "Do not worry...for your heavenly Father knows you need all these things, but first—first each morning, first each moment, set your hearts and minds on God's Kingdom and God's saving justice, that we are all caught up in Jesus' resurrection and all these other things will be yours as well."

Jesus wants us to take him literally here: whenever we become aware that we are worrying, to do on the inside what we are taught to do on the outside when our clothes are on fire: To stop, drop, and roll:

To stop fueling the worry, to drop to our knees, figuratively or literally, and roll in the reality of God which will put out the flames that are scorching our souls. But this is only possible if we have been practicing this turn to the reality of God's presence every day and every Sunday, which is a remembrance of resurrection—Christ's and ours.

We each have to find our own way of turning from our problems to God—every day and every moment we become aware of our worry. This is what it means to seek first the Kingdom of God.

Especially in the face of the fear of death:

I miss Charlie every day, yet I know that when I make my journey into eternity, Charlie will come running around the corner to greet me and show me around the place, until we are given resurrection bodies in the New Creation where we will know what has been true all along: that all creation is filled with God.