

The clarion call to a spirit of gratitude

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St Francis – Pentecost + 17 – Lam 1 1-6, Ps 37 1-9, 2nd Tim 1 1-14, Lk 17 1-10

When I first came here halfway through my training for ordination, I was put under the supervision of Fr. Francis Horner SSM. Francis was a self-confessed gardener. Most of his waking hours were spent tending the gardens of this church. And out there, he was very much the human face of this parish for our many passers-by. They couldn't have met a lovelier, quieter, gentler person. It was one of the special qualities of this parish that people on the street outside got to meet someone of such deep prayer and compassion. I feel very blessed to have had such a person forming me for ministry.

The saint whose name Francis took at his profession, Francis of Assisi, is celebrated for his own special connection with nature. St Francis inspired the hymn which opened and closes our worship today. Singing those words reminds us of our primal vocation. Scripture says we're here to serve and protect creation.

And it goes both ways. When we ensure that creation can flourish, then its health, its abundance, its diversity and its beauty bless us by revealing to us the nature of God. That two-way relationship is something this hymn teaches us to live out. It reminds us to bear witness that all of creation, by its simple existence, praises God constantly. Singing this hymn unites us with all creation and with the whole Church as together we celebrate our Maker.

Today we look back at where we've been through this Season. And then we can also turn to look forward along the path that

the Season's Psalms, readings from the prophets, and the example of Jesus and his early Church have encouraged us to walk. And we're particularly conscious today of the guidance of Christ's disciples who've been called or chosen to be called Francis.

So first, looking back. This Season, we've had Heather and Pauline give us practical insights into local land-care, and into living in ways that are careful of Earth. We all have to do that as and where we are. We've also seen how Earth care and living justly are closely linked; that the gap between rich and poor must close. And we've been mindful of the fact that the worldwide Church is large enough to really make a difference in some of the most pressing issues we face today. With a commitment to unified action, the Church can have a real, transformative impact on the climate, refugee and inequity crises.

Our parish council has been working on that trajectory for this parish – and today we focus on two parts of that trajectory. One is our response to God's call to serve and protect the natural order. Council has also recognised a call to the just sharing of God's gifts to all the living. One of our responses has been to incorporate ecological and justice commitments into our draft Mission Action Plan. Everyone on our email list got a copy of this in my weekly.

Working with Canon Bill Goodes, and under the guidance of David Plumridge as chair, Council has built a Mission Action Plan on the framework of the Anglican Communion's five marks of mission. We'll soon discuss the whole document together.

The ecological focus of that plan is based on the fifth mark of mission.

5. We will safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

and under that heading, Council has identified seven practical

commitments.

- We will continue to be conscientious in our care for the Church grounds
- We will further develop the children's garden area
- We will continue to be conscientious about recycling and limiting the use of paper
- We will optimise the use of our solar panel installation and other energy use
- We will continue to promote creation care and climate change action in our publicity
- We will continue to observe the Season of Creation in liturgy and action
- We will consider promoting the use of the Aunty Barb's Walk app to encourage

walking around the South-East corner of the city.

They're mainly developments of things we already do – and that's advisable, because we need to commit to things we *can* actually do. We're careful to make our grounds attractive and hospitable to the community – to develop children's love of being in the sun and fresh air and gardening. And the gardens are well used. We seek to be careful with earth's resources, and to live and promote the link between Earth-care and justice. These are all things we've been exploring over this Season of Creation. I hope we decide to take up the last suggestion – where we link creation care with justice for First People through Aunty Barb Wingard's walking history journey. (Download the App – 'Aunty Barb walk')

In the Gospel today – where we're called to see ourselves as slaves – we're challenged at the deepest level to confront what we've identified as the biggest ecological issues; greed, selfishness and apathy. Like Jesus, St Francis, left behind his wealth and his rights. Preaching to humans and wildlife alike, he proclaimed a spirit of gratitude. People we meet who are filled with gratitude are astounding. There's no room in

them for envy, resentment or greed. They're too busy giving; giving thanks, giving compassion, giving generously, giving praise to God for all of it, just as we call all creation to do in Francis' hymn.

There's that hymn again; a clarion call to a spirit of gratitude; gratitude whose firstborn child is generosity. That's where real difference can be made; that's the call we hear this Season of Creation. Now is our time to respond. Thanks be to God! Amen