

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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“Do not worry about your life,” says Jesus in today’s reading from Matthew. Clearly Jesus did not know about Pandemic, or hurricane Helena, or other disappointment, tragedy or other unexpected event. “Don’t worry” – are you kidding? There is so very much to worry about – the economy, school, my children, the election, my parents, the President’s health, democracy, systemic racism. (I could name more but you get the picture and probably have your own list of worries). Worry is one of those things that can consume us overwhelm us, weigh us down with the sheer force of its load. *“Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?”* Jesus asks. What we have learned from medicine is that not only does worrying not add a single hour to our life, it can actually take hours away. And mental health professionals are noting with alarm, the tremendous increase of mental illness

And YES Jesus knew and knows us and trouble in Israel and the world, he knows us and the creation. And St. Francis, the Saint whose feast we celebrate today was one of the first to understand Jesus message in his life. Our Gospel today. We remember Francis today because of his devotion and love for all of God’s creatures and creation.

Growing up in 12th century Assisi, Francis was weighed down with the way his family and other persons with power, wealth, and privilege behaved and treated others. While still a young man, Francis began to feel God prompting

him to question the direction of his life. He would visit abandoned churches and lonely places to pray for God's guidance. An experience with illness and time in the military during war caused him to reconsider all of what burdened him.

Francis renounced his life of wealth and privilege, and embraced a God who invites us to see things differently, to consider a new perspective. "*Consider the lilies, look at the birds,*" Matthew writes – notice creation, pay attention to the creatures. When I am worried or feeling anxious, I generally want to do nothing more than to sit on the couch and scroll through an ever worsening parade of news. Worry can turn us inward; the worry of how we are seen or perceived can blind us to seeing God's love for us and for all God's creatures and creation.

Yet I find that when I turn attention away from that which draws me into deeper worry and turn toward God's creatures and God's creation, I am able to see with new eyes, that I am open to new insight about God and God's intentions for me.

And my furry creatures at home, help me to leave behind those worries that can paralyze.

Pets are so much:

Pets are like children. They want to get love, they want to be fed. They are crying at night if they are in need of something.

Pets are companions. For a particular time period of our life our pets are with us. They go through every emotion with us. They see us crying, they see us

laughing, they see us sick, they see us full of energy. Some pets are more stay at home pets (like cats), other pets are going everywhere with us.

Pets comfort us. Pets feel how we are doing and what we need. I think we all know a situation when our pet came just in the right moment to be with us.

Pets are hungry. They are hungry for love and for food. They can make a big drama, if there is not enough or not the right food. And for sure our food is always better than there's.

Pets can be stubborn. Especially cats do what they want to do. You cannot really educated them. But also dogs. I am just thinking about Rosie – the dog we are fostering from time to time. She does not wants to go out when it is dark. And sometimes she wants to decide which direction to take on her walk. If it is not her decision it might be that she is sitting down in the middle of a busy section and you either have to carry her or have to go her way.

But with all their drama and their stubbornness. Pets are one thing first. They are family members. They make our life better and we love them. And not to forget. Pets are part of the creation of God.

These pets whom we bless this day, offer some lessons, I believe – they offer a reminder to be present, and to participate; to notice what friends and family, neighbors and strangers are saying and seeing; a reminder to pay attention so that we may understand the deep longings and needs of the world around us so desperately in need of being seen.

And also, I believe the lessons in our gospel today and in the life and witness of Francis are this: See with new eyes and insight, do not let worry cut you off from relationship with God. In that perfect freedom of relationship with

Jesus, Francis was able to see God in ALL of God's creation – in the earth and sea, in the moon and the sun, the two legged and the four-legged and all that lives on the earth.

And as we celebrate this day, may these dear, beautiful pets we've brought for a blessing nudge us with their cold noses and gentle kisses into remembering to see the world with open eyes and open hearts.

AMEN.