

The Reverend Theo Robinson's Sermon for October 4, 2026

Genesis 1:24-31 - "A Lesson From St Francis"

We praise and bless you, Lord, and we give thanks to you. Amen.

Our Season of Creation is winding down, but it's a season we should always lift up! And what a great way to end the season! Having God's wonderful creatures join us for worship and to receive a blessing, today we celebrate our four-footed and two-winged family members. October 4 is designated as the day to celebrate the feast of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and ecology. This 13th-century Italian friar is often remembered for his deep humility, his simple life of prayer, and as someone who loved creatures and creation.

You will often see St Francis depicted surrounded by birds and animals, as he is this morning up here at our altar. Francis had a special connection with all of God's creatures. I read a story about how he preached a sermon to 100 birds about being thankful to God for their wonderful clothes, for their independence, and for God's care. The story said that the birds stood still as he walked among him, only flying off when he said they could leave!

I think my favorite part of our creation story is that God created the animals and the birds first. "God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind and the cattle of every kind and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good." (Gen 1:25) It was only once God saw that creation needed caretakers did God create humans. (And honestly, they probably would have been fine without us!)

We humans think that we're the top of the power pyramid, but if it weren't for the animals, birds, and fish, we'd be nothing. We'd have no purpose. We'd have no source of food or income. Genesis 1:28 states "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." We often mistake this verse to mean that we have been given divine power to control and dominate everything on the earth, that we can use the earth's resources in anyway we deem fit.

But in that verse, God is giving us a creation mandate. We are told to procreate and grow the population. We are told to spread ourselves all over the earth. And we are told to be stewards of the earth, called to protect animal life and care for the planet with the justice and protection of a righteous caretaker, not through cruel exploitation. We are meant to safeguard creation, not manage it.

St Francis' example of selfless love inspired others to follow him and together they preached the love of God to all and sought "to follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps". For St Francis, the teachings of the gospel extended to all of God's creatures, not just those who walk upright on two feet. Francis was in awe of the swallow and cricket and rabbit and saw sacredness even in the smallest bug. His teaching to us is that the world of nature and the world of God are one. When Jesus calls on us to love our neighbour, that includes every living thing in creation. St Francis reminds us that we are a part of our environment and are called to love and protect it.

As we head into the blessing of our beloved pets, I leave you with this prayer from Sacred Pauses:

Blessed are you, Lord God,
maker of all living creatures.
You called forth fish in the sea,
birds in the air
and animals on the land.
You inspired St. Francis to call all of them his brothers and sisters.
We ask you to bless this pet.
By the power of your love,
enable it to live according to your plan.
May we always praise you for all your beauty in creation.
Blessed are you,
Lord our God,
in all your creatures!

Amen