

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I confess to not getting much sleep last night because it's St. Francis Day. What that means is that the 10:00 service, the place is full of animals. I'm not a ... I never had a pet growing up. I'm not particularly comfortable around animals, and the whole thought of having the church full of creatures makes me very uncomfortable. It's a crazy thing to do, to bring animals into church. But people seem to love it. Last year we were packed full of people who come who we've never seen before, so it's a good thing to do. But I can't help thinking about all the things that could go wrong.

Cats and dogs fighting, rodents escaping, somebody bringing a snake. All these things haunt me in the middle of the night. I shared some of these fears with Ann Moses, one of our vestry members. She loves animals. She actually has a horse, but thankfully the horse is staying at home for the 10:00 service. She told me when she was a little girl, that she put her cat in the trunk on the way to church on St. Francis Day and halfway to church, the cat was seen to jump out and was never seen again. Talking to Ann didn't help me. Just made me aware of more things that could go wrong. Escaping animals.

But then I thought maybe St. Francis Day is actually quite a good day to do something ridiculous, something crazy, something that makes no sense because so many things could go wrong. Because St. Francis was famous for doing crazy things. He was born into a rich family but when he was in his early 20s, he stripped naked in the town square of Assisi to renounce his inheritance in front of his parents, the bishop and all the people of Assisi. Then later, in the middle of a war, he walked unarmed through the battlefield to meet the enemy's leader. He hugged lepers. He preached to the birds, which I'm sure is very sweet, but I don't think his stewardship sermon would have been very effective in that context.

I could go on. But you get the picture. And Francis knew what people said about him. But he didn't mind. He reveled in it. He actually called himself God's Fool. Just like St. Paul who called himself a Fool for Christ and wrote in that epistle that we just heard about the good news he preached looked like foolishness to many.

St. Francis and St. Paul were both convinced that they were called to follow Jesus's way, and then both recognized that to do that involved being different to the majority. To being on the fringe. To doing things that many people would dismiss as ridiculous because they were following the way of Jesus, which itself looked crazy. I mean, just think of Jesus himself. He said things that, in many ways, looked crazy. Love your enemy. Turn the other cheek when someone attacks you. To give someone your tunic when they ask for a shirt. To go on forgiving 70 times 7 times. Most people might think that Jesus's teaching was a bit crazy. But St. Francis didn't. In fact, he prided himself on taking the teaching of Jesus literally.

And you know to some extent, we're all carrying on the tradition of being fools for Christ. I mean look at us. Here we are. 7:30 on a Sunday morning. What a crazy time to get up and go to church. And what's at the center of our worship this morning? We get up at this ridiculous, crazy hour to gather at the Eucharist as we hear again the story of Jesus's death on a cross and his mighty resurrection, a story which St. Paul says is foolishness to the Greeks and I might add, nonsensical to many of our neighbors. Yet God's wisdom is beyond all human understanding. His wisdom can seem crazy to us. In His wisdom, He chose to reveal Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. And when He wanted to reveal the depth of His love for each one of us, He went to the cross and was executed. To show us His power and His glory, he brought Jesus back to life and by His wounds we are healed. How crazy is that? It's wild enough to be wonderfully true. For as St. Paul concludes, God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom. And God's weakness is stronger than human strength. Amen.