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St. Francis Day
Primary Text: Luke 12:13-21
5 October 2025

Today we remember a fellow we now call St. Francis.

Francis was born almost 900 years ago in what is now Italy.

His dad was a cloth merchant, so Francis grew up wealthy.

After being bedridden for a year as a result of
being a prisoner of war, he gave it all up.

Francis went on to found a new community
now known as the Franciscan friars,

who are known for their work with folks
and their poverty in material wealth.

The Gospel appointed for St. Francis' day is from Luke.

The story starts with two brothers arguing over money.

Instead of settling their disagreement, as one brother demands,
Jesus instead tells a story, a story that includes
Neither inheritance nor siblings.

Jesus says, Once there was a man who had a good year, a good harvest,
So he decides to build all new barns to store his goods and grains

. Mr. Man imagines when all this is done he will say to himself:
'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years;
relax, eat, drink, be merry.'"

Sounds like a dream retirement in many ways.

Sounds like he is hedging his bets.

And what's so wrong with that?

When we feel like “And what’s so wrong with that?” in Scripture,
that is a beautiful, faithful place to be.

“And what’s so wrong with that” is an invitation
to wonder, a chance to be curious and feel around in the text.

Yes, this is a story about the limits of material possessions AND
Jesus is also talking about how we deal
with our lack control and independence,
and our need for interdependence.

So in the story, Mr. Man’s soliloquy, which is a mere three verses,
tells us how in control and how independent he feels
So many first person parts of speech, many I’s, my’s, me.

“What should I do, for I have no place to store **my** crops?”

¹⁸Then he said, “I will do this: I will pull down **my** barns
and build larger ones,
and there I will store all **my** grain and **my** goods.

¹⁹And I will say to **my** soul... ”

That’s 11 first person pronouns
in 2.5 verses.

That’s more than 4 per verse,
In case you’re curious.

What’s really, really curious is that Mr. Man’s is very much in the wrong field
If we want to maintain this sense of individual autonomy and control.
He’s in agriculture, for God’s sake.

Too much water,
too little water,
temperatures too high,
temperatures too low,
temperatures just fine but at the wrong time,

a random bug who finds a crop is tasty.

So many things can turn a promising crop
into a mediocre one,

a bad year, perhaps even

a devastating year.

Even for a relatively

hardy crop

Like grain.

Every farmer's bounty,

including the man in the story,

is inextricably tied, undeniably attached to many things
far beyond his or her or their control.

And if indeed all the conditions are favorable towards the crops that year,
which it seems that they must have been,

It would be physically impossible

for one person to handle this crop alone.

There must have been people working with him
and for him for months

to make this incredible harvest happen.

No one can raise a bigger barn by himself, either.

Barn raising famously takes multiple people,

so much so that in 18th and 19th century

Barn raising was turned into a party in rural America.

Mr. Man cannot take lone credit for his bountiful crop.

He fails to recognize his interdependence.

He assumes a degree of control which he does not have.

and that is why he is called a fool.

This isn't a story about this guy, really. It's a story about us.

We want to be in control.

We want to feel secure, and that's understandable.

See Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

In reality, even the most independent among us can be brought up short

What insurance companies call an act of God,

by what I would call really bad weather,

by a medical diagnosis, by an accident.

We live in a country in which

the primary reason households go bankrupt

is a medical crisis—

Underneath all of this, whether we are a fictional character or very much not

None of us knows what's going to happen next, and that is scary.

We don't trust God to help us,

largely because we misunderstand God's role,

Thinking God's role is primarily that of vending machine

or warding off bad things

When it's not. It never was. It never will be.

This is the part where I'm supposed to tell you that our pets remind us of the unconditional love of God. That's not this sermon. I've given that sermon. This is the sermon where we think

Francis gives us an example of someone who,

Found freedom in dependence and in relinquishing his control.

And animals, particularly pets, are one way God gives us to practice dependence.

Pets are very dependent on us, and we do not hold that against them.

Mostly. At least not the vast majority of the time.

Pets can be a cue for us to more carefully ponder

How dependence is not always a burden but can be a gift.

Animals generally & our pets specifically also teach us, like Francis,
 of being rich in ways that don't have anything to do w/ material possessions.
 Our own cats, Skittles & Ollie, make me rich in laughter.
 Whether they're playing fetch—yes they do that,
 Have found yet another weird place to nap,
 Or when Ollie is meowing loudly
 because he wants to be held.

So today we say thank you for that which helps us practice interdependence,
 For the ways we give up some of our autonomy for something else—
 For love. For companionship and company in an uncertain world.
 We say thank you for stuffies
 who provide concrete companionship
 in the literal & metaphorical nights of our lives.
 We may be dependent on them
 to help us sleep at night.

We give thanks for animals, particularly for our pets, both past & present.

So thanks be to God for Francis,
 Whose examples remind us of the many ways we can be rich
 rich in faith,
 Rich in personal charisma,
 Rich in kindness,
 Rich in imagination,
 And how embracing our interdependence
 And lack of control
 can actually set us free.
 Amen.