

Father Bernie Lindley

October 4, 2018

Church

This is Father Bernie Lindley from St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, for Voices.

Today is the feast day for St. Francis of Assisi. Many churches have a blessing of the animals service that they do on this day. My church is part of that tradition. In fact, today at 10 am we will be blessing all kinds of pets and various animals in our side garden. Appropriately enough, that garden features a statue of St. Francis holding a bird.

St. Francis was known as a great lover of God's people and all of God's creation. He often referred to God's creatures as brothers and sisters. One story about St. Francis is that one day, while Francis was traveling with some companions, they happened upon a place in the road where birds filled the trees on either side. Francis told his companions to "wait for me while I go to preach to my sisters the birds." The birds surrounded him, intrigued by the power of his voice, and not one of them flew away. He is often portrayed with a bird, typically in his hand.

Francis had been the son of a wealthy cloth merchant, but once he started to live a life dedicated to the teachings of Jesus Christ, he rejected his inheritance and took on a life of poverty, devoting himself to the care of peasants and especially to the care of lepers. Other men were drawn to Francis' simple faith and began to follow him in his ministries. Eventually Francis was given permission from the pope of his time to be recognized as an officially sanctioned group. They took the name "Order of Friars Minor". The word friar, by the way, means brethren. So the religious order that we often call the Franciscans thought of themselves originally and continue to think of themselves today as the lesser brothers that were called to serve God's people in humility.