

**Clackamas United Church of Christ**  
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**8.4.19**

**St. Francis Preaches on Violence**

I lived during a time that was very similar to yours. The 13<sup>th</sup> century. It was full of violence, war, greed, and oppression. And this horrible thing called the “Crusades.”

I looked around and as the Psalmist cried out 3,000 years ago, I cried out, “How long, O Lord? How long are we going to live this way?”

I grew up as the son of a wealthy business man. He sold expensive clothes to the rich people in the land. My dad had wealth and power. He wanted me to follow him in the family business.

So I did. My dad was my model for how to be successful in life. I followed the family business and got rich. I then built my social prestige by throwing lavish parties for my friends. I threw the best parties you have ever seen.

But it left me feeling empty inside. Surely, there was something more to life than parties.

Then one of our neighboring towns went to war against us. War! I thought this would give meaning to my life. If I became successful in war, I would become a real hero.

So I prepared for battle. I was so excited. And we were trounced. Instantly. Many of my friends were killed. But our enemies knew I was the son of a very rich man, so they held me as a prisoner until my dad paid my ransom.

I was in prison for a year. In prison, I caught malaria and almost died. It was in that near death experience when I started asking real questions about my life. I realized that I wasted my life on parties and the “glory” of war. It all left me feeling empty.

It’s like a story Jesus told about a man who became wealthy because his land produced an abundance of crops. The man decided he would tear down his barns because they were too small. Then he would build bigger barns that could hold all of his crops! Then his soul could relax because he had everything he would ever need. Including the envy of everyone in town.

Jesus called him a fool because his life would be taken from him that very night.

If you knew that life was no permanent, that there are no guarantees, how would you live differently? Would your priorities change?

After meeting death face to face, I decided to change my life.

I walked through the outskirts of my town and found a rundown church building. I went in and looked at the crucifix. I heard God say to me, “Francis, rebuild my church.”

That church was messed up! So I began to rebuild it. But soon I realized God wasn’t talking about that church building. God was talking about the church as the people of God.

So I began to preach to everyone who would listen.

Do you know that people during my time thought the answer to swords was ... more swords! They thought the answer to swords was ... bigger swords!

I wondered how people who follow Jesus believe this?!? Jesus, the one who said, "Those who live by the sword die by the sword." You know, we follow him. Yet people in my day decided to trust in the sword more than they trusted in Jesus.

Jesus is the way to peace. He sought peace through peaceful means. Christians of every generation are called to do the same.

I preached this message and people started following me. We went from a few brothers to hundreds very quickly! People knew deep down that this message was important. I told everyone who wanted to follow that we lived by three simple rules: Sell what you have and give to the poor and follow Jesus. Take nothing for your journey. Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.

But there were others who rejected this message. They wanted to trust their swords. Once when I was preaching, nobody was paying attention. So I yelled, "Why aren't you listening? I may as well be preaching to the birds!"

And then the birds came. They listened to what I was preaching.

That's when I realized we are all connected. God's good earth and all that belongs in it. We are all connected. Whatever happens to brother sun, sister moon, sibling tree, brother dog, sister cat, and sibling horse, it happens to us all. We are all interdependent in a web of existence.

In fact, near the end of my life, I went with the crusaders to meet with the Sultan. On the way, I witnessed how awful my Christian brothers were treating people. Their behavior often had nothing to do with the Jesus I knew. But then I met the Sultan. At first, I tried to convert him to Christianity, but then we began to talk. He was kind and magnanimous, he was smart and even mystical in his connection to God. I began to have great respect for him and his religion.

When I returned home, my brothers began to move away from my rules. They began to hoard books and food and began to gain some wealth. This was not what I wanted. I told them this was not the vision. But they decided my teachings were too strict, so they changed them.

Friends, it is time for me to leave, but before I go, I want you to know that God loves you and cares about you. God loves the birds of the air. God cares for them with food and the other necessities of life. All of God's creation is interconnected. Bless one another. Bless the animals. Bless brother sun and sister moon. God knows there are enough curses in the world. We don't need any more of that. We need more blessings.

Bless you. And may you bless one another. Amen.