

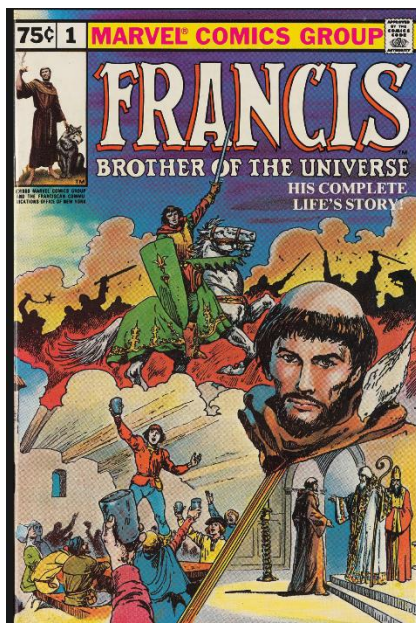
**Sermon – September 8, 2024 – “The Wisdom of St. Francis, pt. 1: Peacemaking”  
by Rev. Dale Carl Fredrickson**

St. Francis of Assisi was known throughout Italy as someone who lived his faith, not just talked about it. He said, "Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words." The famous Greek writer, Nikos wrote a fictionalized biography of St. Francis. The German writer Hermann Hesse wrote a short story about St. Francis. He has been the subject of three major movies, including one by Franco Zeffirelli. He has inspired artists, composers, and musicians of all kinds. Francis has inspired theologians from the right and left: English journalist and theologian G.K Chesterton and liberation theologian Leonardo Boff wrote biographies about him. Boff's was titled *Francis of Assisi: A Model for Human Liberation*. And I learned this week that even Robert F. Kennedy Jr. wrote a biography on Francis. It's a picture book for kids, but he wrote it. I'm going to leave that one right here. Saint Francis is known for his works of love and change. His name is used for soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and hospitals worldwide.

The Wisdom of St. Francis has inspired the faith of millions, including Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians, as well as non-believers. My favorite biography of Saint Francis of Assisi is a Marvel Comic Book titled ***Francis: Brother of the Universe***. That's right, St. Francis is the only Saint whose face has ever graced a Marvel Comic Book, putting him in the same category as the Avengers. And doesn't it make you smile that a Saint whose comic book has sold over ½ million copies is in the same superhero status as Iron Man, Captain America, Spider-Man, Captain Marvel, Wolverine, and the Black Panther?

As I prepared this this week, a conviction grew within me. We long for examples like St. Francis, which help us live a faith that matters. St. Francis has wisdom that we need.

In 1980, Comic book artist John Buscema (bew-sem-a) drew this cover for “**Francis: Brother of the Universe.**” I love how the cover art tells the story of St. Francis. The page layout gives us the storyline of his life.



The **warrior image** is placed in the center of the front cover. The Early aspiration of Francis's life was to become a “worldly knight.” Francis was born into wealth and privilege as the oldest son of a prosperous merchant family in Italy. He is drawn as a soldier fighting in a battle between his hometown, Assisi, and Perugia. He was captured and imprisoned for ransom. He waited for his father’s payment to free him for over a year. His time in prison gave him new dreams and hopes to repair the church and to live a different life. Across the middle of the front cover is a blood-stained silhouette of men in battle with swords, axes, and spiked, club-like weapons. This is a reminder of the cost of war and the dis-ease of the world with its pride, greed, envy, and arrogance.

Just below the war scene, the right and left sides of the cover give us glimpses of his life as a worldly knight and then his life as a **knight for Christ**.

On the left side is Francis, who is said to have been the life of the party. His parents, being prosperous merchants, spared no expense with his clothing and parties. Francis was a spoiled, private school kid with good tastes in clothes, especially shoes, connections, and friends. However, ultimately, this did not bring him the joy he sought.

If we scan our eyes to the right, we see a very different scene from the bar. St. Francis is standing before the Pope. What do we make of this contrast of images?

His time as a POW and his illness had changed him. His dad and mom struggled to understand. Why wouldn’t he want the life they had worked so hard to give him? Francis began to give away his belongings to the poor. He started asking other families in Assisi to offer resources to rebuild the church. This enraged his dad, and finally, his dad took him to see the Pope. This was a **“if mom can’t get through to you, and dad can’t get through, send him to the pastor kind of situation.”** In a dramatic demonstration of his allegiances, Francis takes off his clothes, which shocks everyone, and the Pope places an ordinary robe on him, which signifies his conversion from a worldly knight to a knight for Christ.

Francis heard a call to be a church repairer. First, he did this literally by asking for donations from the well-off in Assisi to rebuild the churches, but later, he saw his ministry as repairing the church’s soul. His ministry moved between seasons of solitary prayer and active ministry to the poor. Saint Francis didn’t change the church by pointing fingers at hypocrisy but by moving his hands to repaint what the church was supposed to be and do. He is inspiring because he is an example of dedicated action.

Cutting his hair short with a bald spot in the middle demonstrated to people his commitment to Christ. Indicated his status as a “slave of Christ.” The narrow hair crown also evokes images of the crown of thrones placed on Christ during his crucifixion. Took a vow of poverty. He took his wealth and privilege and sought to live the simple way of Jesus instead of an extravagant lifestyle. He gave what he had so others could live.

Love for Animals and Nature—He developed a deep love for animals and nature throughout his life.

St. Francis recognized the illness of his own culture and fought for its healing. When I thought about St. Francis this week, I couldn’t help but reflect on our culture’s sickness when I heard the story of a middle-aged woman upset about her Chipotle order. She asked to talk to the manager, and the young assistant manager apologized and remade her

burrito, but she was still steaming. Finally, she unwrapped the burrito and threw it in the young assistant manager's face. Of course, we know about this because the scene was captured with an iPhone, posted online, and went viral. A lawsuit ensued, and in the only redeeming part of the story, the judge sentenced her to 6-weeks of work in a fast-food restaurant instead of jail time. Like St. Francis, we live in a time when our culture needs healing.

**We are trained to be consumers.** We've been conditioned to think that we can buy everything we need when the things we most want cannot be far beyond simple cash exchange.

**We are trained to be critics.** Instead of seeking to understand someone's perspective, we're quick to dismiss; we Distrust and look suspiciously at everyone's motives.

**We are trained to be victims.** Instead of taking responsibility and seeing the challenges of our lives as opportunities for growth, we say, "It's not my fault," or "I've been dealt a lousy hand of cards," or "No one has to carry the burdens I do."

But then there's St. Francis, whose counter-cultural wisdom we need today.... He turns our culture's messages on their heads and writes, "**Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.**"

"**Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.**" Even though we are separated by close to a thousand years from St. Francis, he offers us a profound truth. Do you want to live a meaningful life? Do you want to provide healing to a culture that often looks sick? "**Become peacemakers.**"

Francis was, of course, inspired by Jesus, who said:

**"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons (and daughters) of God."** (Matt. 5:9)

In this passage, Jesus considers the Hebrew concept of peace, Shalom. Shalom (or peace) imagines a world where joy, well-being, harmony, and prosperity are for everyone. God's dream for neighborhoods across the globe is Shalom—block parties, if you will, where there is caring, sharing, and rejoicing.

Shalom is not simply inner tranquility or passing feelings but communal healing and wholeness. Shalom recognizes the inner connectedness of all life. When anyone suffers, everyone suffers. St. Francis challenges us with the words, "**Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.**" When we say them and start to live them, we strive to make God's dream a reality on this earth.

Several Biblical passages imagine Shalom (peace) as community flourishing: fresh fruit and bread for everyone (Leviticus 24:4-6). Other passages imagine rain falling on the parched earth, wild animals no longer threatening human life, and people resting at night without fear (Ezekiel 34:25-29). The prophet Isaiah describes Shalom as a "Wolf living with a lamb" and a "Leopard lying down with a goat" (11:6), and Micah writes, "swords will be made into plowshares (4:3)."

My favorite is Jeremiah 29:7: "But seek the (peace) welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its (peace) welfare you will find your (peace) welfare."

St. Francis' genius is giving us some practical ways to be peacemakers. He writes,

**Where there is hatred, let me bring love.**  
**Where there is offense, let me bring pardon.**  
**Where there is discord, let me bring union.**  
**Where there is error, let me bring truth.**  
**Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.**  
**Where there is despair, let me bring hope.**  
**Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.**  
**Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.**

Finally, it hit me: The wisdom of St. Francis is something like this: "**Let the energy of your life be peacemaking, not consuming, criticizing, or being a victim.**"

Peacemaking is a different action than consuming because it values what you give away, not what you hold onto.

Peacemaking is different from criticizing because it invites you to experience human suffering and demands that you act.

Peacemaking is different from being a victim because it recognizes your power. Even heartbreaking things can happen to those you love. St. Francis challenges us to take that pain and, instead of getting even, become peacemakers. **That's the wisdom of St. Francis, at least pt. 1.**

Wouldn't it be something if we became known throughout Salt Lake City as people who lived their faith, not just talked about it? What if this week, each of us "Preach(ed) the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words."

**Where there is hatred, let me bring love.**  
**Where there is offense, let me bring pardon.**  
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