

# LIVING GENEROUSLY

a stewardship narrative series presented by TENS

## FEAST OF ST. FRANCIS

THE REV. CANON  
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Francis Bernardone, born into a wealthy Assisi merchant family, famously unburdened himself of his privilege in order to take up another yoke. Among the many wonderful, if apocryphal, stories from his life of pilgrimage and poverty are numerous encounters with animals. He is said to have preached to birds, wolves and people alike, and acted as if all were yoked together for good in God's new creation.

Some 800 years later, in the California city that bears the name of Francis, we still struggle to recognize our common yoke. Exciting but profoundly disruptive economic changes make it increasingly difficult for middle-income households to find a home in the beautiful City by the Bay. Tent cities perch uneasily alongside the polished habitations of tech entrepreneurs.

Although the contrast here may seem especially stark, our city is hardly the only place where unlikely neighbors dwell in unsettling proximity. I am reminded of the story of Francis admonishing the wolf that had been terrorizing the town of Gubbio. When Francis realized that the wolf was merely hungry, he asked the skeptical townsfolk to welcome and feed the wolf, with the eventual result that adversaries became friends.



### reflection questions

- Are there inner or outer fears that make it hard for you to see God's new creation?
- What good news do you need to hear — or experience — in order to befriend your fears and share a yoke with those unlike you?
- How might you and your community feed the “good wolf” within yourselves in order to live with greater courage and generosity?

I wonder in what ways we may be called to befriend even that which frightens us the most. It might be the neighbor who seems threatening to us, but it could just as easily be the doubts that our efforts can make a difference.

Even when I fail to see the new creation God is making possible, my church continues to be a community of generous yokefellows who witness to our need for each other, poor and rich alike. Our collective stewardship of time, talent and treasure has fostered robust local institutions like Episcopal Charities, which addresses root causes of poverty in our midst, and Episcopal Community Services, the largest provider of shelter beds in San Francisco. These outreach partners preach good news — sometime even using words, as Francis reminded us to do — but always with shelter, employment development, health advocacy, friendship and food.

Which reminds me of another apocryphal story about wolves that sometimes makes the rounds among preachers. A wise elder counsels a young man that all humans have within us two wolves. One wolf is good and the other evil, he says, and they are constantly fighting each other. The young man asks the elder, “But which wolf will win?” And the elder replies, “The one that you feed.”



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