I’m reading a wonderful, troubling, enlightening, depressing book: *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. I started reading it six weeks ago and had to set it aside for a month before returning to it. It’s slow going, challenging.

The book has been very much on my mind, and today’s readings are teeming with the same themes.

Amos tells the people of Israel—specifically, the wealthy ones—that they will be called to account for turning justice to wormwood, afflicting the righteous, taking bribes, and pushing aside the needy in the gate.

In the gospel reading Jesus tells the rich young man, “You’ve done a great job in the temple and in following all those complicated laws. Now the only thing left for you to do is to make all that religious stuff real: liquidate your assets and give them to the poor.”

That wasn’t some blanket moral prescription he doled out to everyone. It was tailor-made for this man who really loved all his possessions.

On Monday, the Feast of St. Francis, we blessed our pets. Francis’s father, evidently, was like Jesus’ questioner—a wealthy merchant who dealt in fine fabrics. He eschewed his father’s wealth and devoted himself to a life of simplicity and generosity. He is associated with the birds of the air and beasts of the field because he purportedly preached to them, well, praised them, for the way they innocently reflect the love of God, their Creator.

Francis embodied Jesus’ instructions to the rich young man. He lived as the antithesis of those Amos condemned—the exploiters of the poor. Francis embraced the lowliest humans—the lepers—in his world and showed respect even for the less-than-human parts of creation.

He evidently overcame—or “loosed his hold on”—the fears that plague us all: fear of losing everything, of being alone, of failure in general. That liberation helped him to live a life marked by gratitude and praise of God.

It might be what today’s collect has us praying for: that God’s grace will envelope us so that we might be given always to doing good.

Whoever wrote what we now call the “Prayer of Saint Francis,” we know it wasn’t Francis. That’s why our Book of Common Prayer includes it as a prayer *attributed* to him.

Before reading that, however, I’ll read something we believe he did write, *Canticle of the Sun*. Had I planned this sermon enough in advance, we’d be singing that hymn today as we sang it a year ago. It’s rather long, so I’ve edited even the paraphrase by William Draper, Hymn 400 in our hymnal:

All creatures of our God and King,
lift up your voices, let us sing:
Bright burning sun with golden beams,
Pale silver moon that gently gleams,
O praise him, O praise him, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Great rushing winds and breezes soft,
you clouds that ride the heavens aloft,
fair rising morn with praise rejoice,
stars nightly shining, find a voice.

Swift flowing water, pure and clear,
make music for your Lord to hear.
Fire, so intense and fiercely bright,
you give to us both warmth and light.

Dear mother earth, you day by day
unfold your blessings on our way;
All flowers and fruits that in you grow,
let them his glory also show:

All you with mercy in your heart,
forgiving others, take your part,
All you that pain and sorrow bear,
praise God, and cast on him your care:

And even you, most gentle death,
waiting to hush our final breath,
O praise him, alleluia, alleluia!
You lead back home the child of God,
for Christ our Lord that way has trod:

Let all things their Creator bless,
and worship him in humbleness,
O praise him, alleluia!

Praise God the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, three in one:
O praise him, O praise him, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Jesus wanted the rich young man—wants us all—to know the joy that Francis knew, even through the hardships and suffering he endured in life. He wanted his disciples to know the innocent wonder captured in the faces of the children who came to him.

Francis clearly did not write this prayer that appears on page 833 in our prayer book, yet he clearly espoused the humility and joy and love borne by these words. He and his Lord, our Lord, commend them to us all:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is discord, union;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen. + + +