

Creation Series – Blessing
Genesis 1:20-25
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 30, 2018
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Genesis 1:20-25 (NRSV)

²⁰ And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” ²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Today, we are wrapping up the Creation series.

We’ve talked about the mountains and the sky (special things for us Coloradans) and last week we touched on the harvest of creation.

Today, because it is so close to the day that our Catholic friends remember St. Francis and his love for the animals, we’re talking about blessing that part of Creation, domestic and wild, wet and on land, flying overhead and burrowing underground.

With our likenesses (our pictures and stuffed animals) of God’s marvelous animal kingdom with us today, I think it’s okay to address some of them directly.

Fish and ferrets...

Parakeets and snakes (glad for just a likeness)...

Dogs and cats....

While you are here for your own sake, I’ll reach out and say that you represent the other animals that couldn’t be here today...cattle and goats and horses and cougars, giraffes, whales, eels, insects....so many I can’t name them all....

All you creatures: God loves YOU!

God loves you for your own sake – not just what you can do for US.

We have to agree that all creatures (even the ones we're not comfortable with or don't get; the platypus???) that all creatures are good.

Scripture tells us that when God created them, (fish of the sea, birds of the air, and creatures of the land,) God looked at it all and God saw: it was GOOD!

And God blessed them!

God told them to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."

God created the creatures in swarms and herds and mobs (remember the sheep?) and with great diversity.

God wants them to survive and thrive on Earth; which was created for them with the idea that they'd have all they needed to live.

Scripture includes songs in the psalms where we can read that God made the rain to water the trees so the birds have a place to nest.

...made the grass for the cattle to graze

...and the crags as a refuge for the mountain goats.

The Bible also tells us that when the flood came, God rescued each of the species and put them on the ark with Noah.

Not only did God put the rainbow in the sky as a sign of covenant to Noah, but he made that covenant with the fish of the sea and birds of the air, with all animals on Earth to protect them for the future.

Talk about social justice!

God made the first "endangered species act."

Just like us, the animals are called to worship and praise God for what they are created to be.

In the psalms, *the hills clap their hands and the fields are to exalt.* (Ps. 148).

In Revelation, John shared his vision about hearing ALL of creation; everything in heaven, on the earth, under the earth and in the sea, cry out in praise: *“Blessing and honor and glory and power be to our God and to the lamb forever and ever”* (Rev. 5:13).

Truthfully, we humans need to confess, more often, that our stewardship of God’s beloved creatures hasn’t always been the best. Too often, we hear about neglected animals and the “industry” that packing plants are.

Yes, I like to eat meat, but there’s also something to be said, like Dr. Temple Grandin believed when she reformed the livestock industry, about animal welfare.

It’s a hard topic. And that’s OK.

!!There are a lot of tough things to contemplate in the world. Even driving our cars is a tough thing to think about when we remember the conditions in the oilfields and other energy industries.

Being stewards IS a tough calling; but not one we can ignore.

For our faults and best intentions, for our lack of reverence (to recycle) or respect (out on the trails do you **take** nothing but pictures and leave only footprints?) – we need to confess NOT being as aware as we could be....

...that when the cousins of our pets (!) are threatened with extinction or pushed out of their natural habitats

...that we “stewards” (I’ll use the term with a bit of disdain, and I’m guilty too) diminish those creatures, we also destroy them being able to praise God. Talk about a circle of life.

God created it **all** for us to thrive and survive.

Now, not to be ignored or denied: HUMANS, brothers and sisters of the Created, I have another announcement.

God loves you, too.

God loves you for your own sake and wants you to thrive.

When God made you; God saw that it was good.

God also said to US: “*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth*” (Gen. 1:28) And we’ve been pretty good at that, huh? Almost too good!
Our population stretches the bounds of what Earth can sustain in its current state. We’re “steward-bound” to find ways to limit our impact.
God didn’t mean for us to crowd out the rights of other creatures when we were being so fruitful and multiplying.
We need to learn our limits and exercise restraint.

‘Cause, we’ve got SUCH a special responsibility.
A God-given responsibility to exercise dominion – which doesn’t mean that we should exercise **domination** or exploit them, but delight in other creatures.

We’re created in God’s image...and as God delights – SO COULD WE ♥

Have you ever rescued a stray animal?

Whether you make a connection at the Humane Society or meet a four-legged one on a backroad, you can just tell, can’t you, by their eyes, that *they’ve lost faith*.
They’re not ready to trust or believe in you or any OTHER animal.

But, we coax with a treat (or the first meal they’ve had in a while) and a warm spot and by petting them (oh, don’t get me started about the videos on FB!)

Perhaps they, the strays we run into, can teach us something.

Faith has a way of slipping away; prayers seem to go unanswered and life just gets harder.

But, God gives discernment when help comes along; a sense that pessimism can move toward POSITIVE.

And perhaps the right person comes along and a stray doesn’t have to run away anymore.

Are we still talking about 4-legged critters?

People are sometimes strays, too, looking for the right person to come along to help answer their prayers and renew their faith. Maybe that’s how animals “just know” who they want to choose to be their human.

Couldn't we all be more "choose-able?"

That someone who has that "look" could see that we...YOU and me...can be trusted, could provide a meal or a blanket (to be used anywhere) that can restore some faith...to BE someone who sticks with them through the less than wonderful places in life?

Dear Ones, I think that God created us to have a sense of solidarity with other creatures, not superiority. We're created to be companions to one another so that we can thrive and praise God!

Fun fact: WE ARE primate animals. MAMMALS!

And Jesus was too!

He was born and lived in solidarity (not superiority) with all of life.

Jesus cared about those who were oppressed and vulnerable and marginalized by society; and (bear with me) that includes creatures, not just humans.

Bottom line: Jesus died in order that God might reconcile to God's self all things in creation (Col. 1:20).

Listen: we can respond to God's love in ways that enables all of Creation to thrive together.

We don't need to prove anything, but we can set limits and simplify our lifestyle so that others can survive and thrive. We're in this together.

I read this parable the other day:

There was a farmer who grew excellent quality corn that won awards every year.

When a reporter interviewed him, he learned that the farmer shared his seed corn with his neighbors.

"How can you afford to share your best seed corn with your neighbors? They're your competition aren't they?"

"Why sir," said the farmer, "Don't you know? The wind picks up pollen from the ripening corn and swirls it from field to field."

If my neighbors grow inferior corn, cross-pollination will steadily degrade the quality of my corn.

IF I'M to grow good corn, I have to help my neighbors grow good corn."

Whew!

Like the corn farmer, in order to live meaningfully and well, we should help enrich the lives of others.

The old saying goes that "the value of a life is measured by the lives it touches."

Okay, last story for today.

A writer had a dream and said:

I was in the front row of a church watching a Communion service.

The pastor was giving bread to the first person kneeling at the rail, but then, as I looked down the rail, the next figure was a snake, curled at the bottom, but reaching up over the rail, straining forward to receive the bread, the Grace of Jesus.

Next was another person but, next to them, was a raccoon with paws up on the communion rail leaning forward to receive the bread, the Grace of Jesus. And there at the end, was a bird eating bread crumbs.

The dreamer wrote that, suddenly the walls of the church disappeared and there was a thick forest with all kinds of wild animals roaming around. They said, it was like the walls of separation had been removed and there was a seamless connection of all creation praising God, as they'd all shared in the meal of reconciliation.

That vision made me think, that as stewards of God's Creation, we can't think of our worship in the way we have before.

We're called, in our care of Creation, it's a holy calling to see all of Earth as the sanctuary in which we worship...and

where we can build relationship with God and each other...

where we can confess and give thanks and praise God...

...even go so far as to offer ourselves to God's call toward connection with the animals of Creation.

As we think of the blessing prayer we had earlier, I think we can all agree that we're fortunate because we have relationships of love and care and loyalty – not just between us and other TWO-LEGGED creatures, but also with our pets (and other animals.)

That type of relationship is how it SHOULD be!

Even if you don't have a pet (or a grand-pet) we can learn and then model how all relationships between humans and other animals should be.

So, to close – I wanna bless YOU, you two-legged animals.

When we claim solidarity with God's creatures, then we should be included in a blessing.

May God bless YOU with health and safety and well-being and long life AND with relationships that are filled with love and joy.

Amen!