

Sunday, September 26, 2021

Blessing of Animals

A sermon by Rev. Dawn Allen-Herron

with the People of St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Anchorage

Thank you, Jess and Heidi and children of St. Mary's for the telling of the Godly Play story today. In the way of Godly Play, I wonder....

- I wonder what part of the story you like best?
- I wonder what part of the story is most important?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder if there is any part of the story that we can leave out, and still have all the story we need?

And I also wonder....

- I wonder if our pets know this story, too?
- I wonder if other creatures know it?
  - Have their ancestors passed the story down to them, too?
- I wonder what parts of the story *they* like best....
  - ...and what part is about them?

At the outset of the “Blessing of Animals” section of today’s service, we sang *All God’s Critters Got a Place in the Choir*,<sup>1</sup> and we’ll sing even more verses as our closing hymn today.

I always thought that this was one of those silly songs that we added for fun on this Sunday, amid the “important” songs like *All Things Bright and Beautiful*.

But here it is, and it’s deeply theological, and important:

All God’s creatures **do** have a place in the choir.

(In the Psalms, images of praise by all of creation.)

The covenant made following the flood

Genesis 9:10: “I establish my covenant with you and your descendants, *and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth.*”

In this story, the animals are actually a CENTRAL POINT.

The promise of God is for all of creation.

Every living thing that, like you and me, have the Maker’s Thumbprint,  
which can never be wiped out.

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<sup>1</sup> Song is based on the book [All God’s Critters](#) by Bill Staines.

We bless *these* animals

as a way of reminding ourselves

of the blessedness of *every* creature

From time of creation, humans were given *DOMINION* over creation.

Too often, understood as *DOMINATION*.

Perhaps we'd like, better, to translate this as "given charge of"

and to think of it as "being stewards of."

But the truth is that we *DO* have enormous power.

You and I know that we have too often misused it.

This is *MORE* than being irresponsible.

It is a break in our part of a *COVENANT* between God and us and all of creation.

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And so.... I want to address you varieties of dogs and cats<sup>2</sup>

and other creatures who are here today.

And I want to speak with you fish and ferrets

and hamsters and parakeets and snakes

brought here today by your human companions,

or sent in photographs, or represented by collars or stuffies,

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<sup>2</sup> Here begins a section of this sermon that is highly indebted to a sermon by David Rhoads, found here <http://www.letallcreationpraise.org/worship-services/blessing-of-the-animals/blessing-of-all-the-animals--a-sermon>

or held in our hearts.

You are here for your own sake,

and you also represent all those who are not here today,

animals of every kind—cattle and goats and horses

and elephants and bees and cougars and crocodiles

and puffer fish and eels and insects--

so many we cannot name them all.

I want to announce the good news to all you creatures. I want you to know that ***God loves you***. God loves you for your own sake—and not because of what you can do for humans.

You are ***good in yourselves***.

When God created you, God took one look at you, and said,

***That's GOOD!***

God created you in huge swarms and in great diversity.

God wants all of you to survive and to thrive on Earth.

God created the world for you, so that you have what you need to live.

And just like us, you are called to worship God.

You are to praise God by ***being who you are and exalting in it***.

We human animals need to confess to you that we have not always seen you as God's creatures.

We have not shown proper reverence or respect.

We have failed to set limits upon ourselves so that you might live and thrive.

And we are sorry.

You who are here today are so fortunate because you have human companions who care for you. But so many of your cousins are not so fortunate.

When we destroy you and diminish you in these ways,

we not only compromise your ability to survive,

we also *stifle your capacity to praise God.*

Now I want to address you human creatures.

I want to announce the good news to you also.

God loves you.

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

When God created you, God took one look at you, and said,

***That's GOOD!***

God even created us humans with a special responsibility—to exercise dominion (Gen. 1:28).

We are given the task of *delighting in other creatures*, as God does,  
and respecting and caring for them.

We are to love with a MATURE LOVE  
that is more interested in the good for the other,  
than their usefulness for us.

In response to God's love for us,  
we are freed to behave in ways that *enable all of life to flourish together*.

We do not need to prove anything.

We can set limits on yourselves.

We can simplify our lifestyles so that others may flourish.

I wonder....

I wonder what it might be like if we – all of us –

Were to continually offer blessing to each other.

I wonder what it might look like to bless all creatures,

Companions, friends, and those who are not yet friends...

I wonder what it would look like if our blessing became more than words,

But actions,

Or stillness,

That brought flourishing life to all God's critters.

I wonder what if we sang our part,

But only our part, in God's choir,

And if we listened carefully for the other voices, too.

*May God bless each of you with health and safety and well-being and long life. And may God bless your relationship together so that it may be filled with love and joy."*