

Animal Blessing service

GENESIS 1: 20-25

We start, always, with creation. Which is strange, in a way, because the force of the scriptural witness is liberation first; creation next. “Who is God” scripture asks. Then it answers: “God is the One who brought us out of slavery in Egypt and who raised Christ Jesus from the dead. Oh – and by the way - God also created the world.”

But we’ve been noticing, in Bible Study, as we work our way through Acts – when Paul is preaching to people who aren’t Jews, and who had never heard of Jesus of Nazareth, he begins with creation. “Who is God?” God is the One who created this world. ALL of it. This world is a good gift from a good God. YOU are a good gift from a good God. And all those feelings you have? The feelings of loneliness, or fear, of longing and joy....

Those feelings – that’s your insides, saying I AM part of it all, and my soul longs for the One who created me and longs for the oneness I was created for.

And when an animal comes into our lives, and brings joy and laughter and unconditional love (as well as dug up gardens and chewed shoes and scratched curtains) that’s part of God’s creation too. All of that – a sign that we are not alone....that we are created for community, for each other, created to care for one another

Sometimes, when I’m talking with children about God....trying to find the words to explain to them how much God loves them, no matter what...sometimes you never know what their experience has been at home ...so to say “God is like your dad” - or “God is like your mom” – maybe that does it and maybe not. Often, more than often, a child has experienced unconditional no-matter-what love from their dog. And that’s the way in to the child’s sense of trust and understanding what it is to experience and to give love.

I’m reading a book right now called Born to Be Good and it gives scientific, biological research that shows that we are most likely to be happy and fulfilled and to thrive physically as well as emotionally when we care for another being.

I don’t know what part animals play in that scenario in your life but I do know this: they bring a sense of life and love and purpose to many of us, and we, all of us together, are made in God’s image and made for each other.

GENESIS 9: 8-13

I love rainbows. The very first covenant in scripture is this one. A covenant. What’s that? A promise – a “pinky-swear” – a deal and a promise for all time.

After the flood, God put the rainbow in the sky and said THERE! That's so we won't forget, you and I. When I see and when you see the rainbow, we'll remember. We were made for each other, you and I. I want to be your God and I want you to be my people. And my promise is for you for all time. For ALL of you. Not just some humans. All humans. Not just for humans either – but for the animals (not just the cute and fluffy ones either – but all animals) and for the trees and the rocks and the water.....

All of us together a sacred community – a family of sisters and brothers . All of us at the same table – the dinner table which is this world, and where there is enough for everyone, if you share.

We belong together – God says so.

And so, the rainbow covenant shines and drips and shimmers and gurgles with promise. God's covenant... God's promise....is for us all.

All other covenants have this as the starting place. God's rainbow promise is for us all. Those of us with two feet, four feet, paws, claws, fins and feathers. God, our creator, opens arms wide and gathers us all in.

LUKE 10: 25-37

The lawyer said "And who IS my neighbour?"

And we haven't stopped asking that question since. Jesus' answer seems to be twofold: our neighbour is anyone who needs us....ANDwhen WE'RE the ones who are in need, our neighbour may well turn out to be someone we thought was our enemy....someone "beneath us" – someone we'd never expect.

And speaking of beneath us....tell me this: do you think this world is more like a triangle, or more like a circle?

One view of the world is that it's like a triangle: a pyramid , with God at the top, and beneath that, angels. Beneath that, humans, starting with men, then under that, women, and children, and under that, the clean animals and then under that, the unclean ones, then at the very bottom the earth itself.

Is it like that?

Or is it a circle? A circle with no one at the top? Where God is not "up" somewhere, a big boss in the sky, but rather in the circle or maybe the circle itself....the centrifugal, and centripetal force of it....

This morning I want to hold out the vision of the circle today. A circle, where all creation is our neighbour. Who IS my neighbour, the man asked. Are animals my neighbour? YES. YES they are our neighbour. They need our help and protection – our respect and our gentle care.

AND they are sources of wonderful comfort. They understand when we're sad – have you ever experienced the amazing sensitivity of an animal in that way? They give us joy and pleasure and playfulness and spontaneity and just plain goofiness that we humans need so badly.

May we be good neighbours to them. May we respect their homes and their right to good lives. Just by the fact of the life force in their veins, the breath in their warm furry bodies, just because of their paws on the earth, they are a blessing. This world is a better place for their lives. May we be good neighbours – worthy of their love and their care and the gifts they give us. Worthy to share the neighbourhood with them.

Thank you God for our neighbours the animals.