

Season of Creation: Fauna – April 17, 2016

Job 39:1-12 and Luke 12:22-31

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Like I mentioned earlier, in recognition of Earth Day coming up on April 22, we will spend the next four Sundays taking a closer look at the world around us. We begin our four-week series on the Creation with a day focused on our fellow creatures – animals, birds, bugs, fish, lizards – any living creature that inhabits water, air or land. From the smallest gnat to the largest elephant – this day is spent focused on them.

If we look at the biblical account of creatures, they are mentioned at the very beginning, on page one of Genesis. Scripture recounts the creation of all sorts of critters that creep, crawl, swim and fly, with God giving them all the directive to be fruitful and multiply. Humankind was created last, in the image of God, and given the directive to also be fruitful and multiply, but additionally to have dominion over all other living creatures. We've done pretty well with the fruitfulness command, now having over 7 people billion living on earth. It's the dominion part we've not quite understood.

Whenever creatures are mentioned in scripture, there is an underlying assumption that they each have their way of living, thriving and surviving. That in their creation, God provided them both an innate means to flourish and the resources around them in which to do so. Without getting overly scientific, since I am by no means a scholar in that regard, this world has an orderliness about it that allows for the continuance of life.

The ancients recognized that in their observations of the world around them. Unless domesticated, creatures didn't need the help of humans to survive in this world. They did pretty well on their own.

And looking at the Old Testament lesson from the Book of Job, when God responds to Job's defense of his righteousness and line of questioning, God points out to Job his incredible lack of knowledge and wisdom. Job is looking for answers as to why he is suffering, and he brings his case before God. How on earth could Job possibly understand the ways of God, God wants to know. God's wisdom is far beyond anything that Job could comprehend, and in chapter 39, God highlights the ways of particular animals to illustrate the point. God is pointing out the complexity and intricacy of the animal kingdom that can survive just fine without the help or knowledge of humans. The world and its creatures has been created in such a way to, again, allow for them to flourish.

Then we jump to the New Testament, to the Gospel of Luke. Jesus is teaching his disciples not to worry about their lives, specifically what they will eat and what will they wear. This is an important concern for anyone who is living in poverty and wondering how they can survive. Jesus uses examples from the natural world to show God's providential care. The ravens don't grow crops or store grain away, but they are still able to find food that God has provided for them. The lilies grow in the fields during their season as a part of the natural order of things. Jesus uses these examples because they are so obvious. The world has been created with all the resources needed for both creatures and humans to survive. Of course, drought and storms and other natural disasters will effect creatures and humans alike, but life will continue on. The world's resources are exactly what the creatures of the world need to survive. Water to drink, food to eat, and habitats in which to live.

That however is no longer true.

With the advent of technological advances, humanity now has the ability to affect our creaturely cousins in ways never imagined by the biblical writers. There was never a need to caution against disturbing the balance of nature, because really, how could human beings impact on such a scale, this amazingly huge and awe-inspiring world around us?

We are not unaware of the damage being done to the creatures that live on the earth. Whether it's polluted air or waterways killing animals, birds and fish, deforestation and suburban sprawl destroying wildlife habitats, pesticides and the rise of invasive species disturbing the balance within the food chain, and any number of human-caused disasters - we are causing immense damage upon our creaturely kin.

For too long the Christian response has been one of apathy and ignorance. Or when confronted by statistics of the destruction, too many Christians pull the "dominion" card to justify our wanton abuse of the animal kingdom. Friends, this cannot continue.

Ignorance is bliss. Truly it is. If we don't really know all the specifics of the harm that is occurring to our animal kin, then we don't have to make a decision about how to respond. But with the amount of information we have within our easy reach, it becomes harder and harder to ignore the truth.

Now, I'm not going to tell you what to do. I think that is something that each one of us needs to decide on our own, but I think our Christian identity compels to do something. If we believe that this world is indeed good, as Genesis affirms, then what is happening to animal kind is not good. There are many ways to get involved. There are groups that fight for endangered species. There are preserves that care for injured wildlife. There are causes that stand against the destruction of habitats. And the list goes on.

I want to share a personal story with you. I have been vegetarian for a little over three years. I often get asked why I decided to change my eating habits. It started when I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2010. I did a lot of research about the potential causes of the cancer. Mine in particular was the type that multiplied by feeding on estrogen, a feminine hormone. I had heard that often cows and chickens were injected with estrogen to cause them to grow larger and more rapidly. It hasn't been proven that that estrogen can be transmitted through meat, but it is certainly a possibility. Additionally, in my research I learned about the horrors of factory farming.

I have been an animal lover my entire life. As a young child I wanted to be a pet shop owner when I grew up. As I grew older, I was constantly bringing home stray cats. I truly loved animals. I never really made the connection about what meat was prior to becoming meat. I mean, it seems so obvious, right? But I had been eating meat my entire life, but I never realized its connection to a living creature. Eating meat was just the thing that people did, and the few vegetarians I knew were just a little weird. And then I saw videos and read articles about factory farming.

People have said to me, "I don't want to know." I get that. Ignorance is bliss. If you don't know, then you don't have to think about it. So I won't share the details now. I'll leave it there.

So for a while I greatly reduced my meat intake and when I did eat meat, I only ate meat from local organic farmers. But it wasn't long after that I stopped eating meat entirely. It wasn't really that difficult. After about two years meat free, I then occasionally started eating fish and seafood. However, I do have a goal of eventually becoming vegan – no animal products at all. I'm not there yet, but hopefully someday.

I think that's a good start for me. And each one of us can start somewhere. I think that awareness is important. And as we become more aware of humanity's negative impact on animal-kind, we will find something that strikes us. God's Spirit will nudge us in a particular direction where we can make a difference. Because it will take everyone doing something. Maybe you can save the whales, or support the Marathon County Humane Society. Maybe you can do no-meat Mondays, or write a letter to Congress to better regulate factory farms. Whatever you do, do something. Our world has an orderly balance that allows for abundance and prosperity for all species. By God's grace and power, let us make a change for the good.