



Let All Creat

Welcome!

Background (Why?)

Season of Creation

Worship Resources

Preaching

Occasional Services

Devotions

Sanctuary

Links



Navigation

▼ United States

Readings

Spirit Series (A)

Word Series (B)

Wisdom Series (C) --
2016Episcopal Creation
Season

Canada

▼ Australia

Catholic Season of
Creation

▼ Europe

Scotland

South Africa

[Special Days](#) > [Blessing of the Animals](#) >

Blessing of All the Animals: A Sermon

By David Rhoads

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." 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. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the sea, and let birds multiply on the earth. . . . And God said, "Let the earth bring forth creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. 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 (Gen. 1: 20-25).

And Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15 from the longer ending).

. . . . through him [Jesus] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col. 1:20)

First, I want to address you varieties of dogs and cats 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. 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. The good book tells us that when God created you—fish of the sea and birds of the air and creatures of the land—God looked at all God had created, and God saw that “indeed, it was very good!” (Gen. 1:12, 18, 21, 25, 31)

When God created you, God blessed you. God told you to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). 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.

The psalmist tells us that God made the rain to water the trees, the trees for you birds to nest, the grass for you cattle to graze, and the crags as a refuge for you mountain goats (Ps. 104:14-24). God wants you to receive your “food in due season” and to be “filled with good things” (Ps. 104: 27-28).

The Bible tells us that when the flood came, God rescued each of your species through Noah in the ark. And God made a covenant with you fish of the sea and birds of the air and domestic animals and all animals on Earth to protect you for the future (Gen. 9:8-17). God made the first “endangered species act.”

Just like us, you are called to worship God. The hills are to clap their hands. The fields are to exalt (Ps. 148). You cattle and dogs and cats are to praise God by being who you are and exalting in it. John the seer had a vision in which he heard the entire 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).

We human animals need to confess to you that we have systematically mistreated you, depleted your numbers, destroyed you, slaughtered you, crowded you out, neglected you, dealt with you as commodities in our quest for comfort and ease. We have not seen you as God’s creatures. We have not shown proper

reverence or respect. Against God's will, we have not set limits upon ourselves so that you might live and thrive. What we have done! 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 threatened with extinction—snow leopards and timber wolves and green sea turtles and condors and paddlefish and fin whales among so many others. We humans may so crowd out or deplete these kin of yours that not a single one of them will ever again exist on Earth.

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. Along with all creation, you are groaning in labor pains, waiting for the revelation of children of God who will care for creation and make provisions for you to thrive (Rom. 8:19-23).

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 made you; God saw that this too was good.

God said also to you: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth" (Gen. 1:28) Yet we have already done this! So we need to find ways to limit the impact of our species, because God did not mean for us to crowd out the rights of other creatures to be fruitful and multiply also. In developed countries, we have become like an infestation—taking over land and destroying habitats and devouring species and infiltrating homes and migratory routes of so many other animals—and we need to learn our limits and exercise restraint.

God even created us humans with a special responsibility—to exercise dominion (Gen. 1:28). This does not mean that we are to exercise domination over other creatures or to exploit them for human mis-use. Rather, we are to delight in other creatures, as God does, and respect and care for them. Our love for creation is the only basis for our right use of creation. We are to exercise dominion as servants of creation. As Jesus has said, we are not to lord over anyone, but be as slaves to all (Mark 10:42-45). We are to take responsibility for all creatures, to serve their needs, and to work to preserve them (Gen. 2:15).

And we are to do this not with a sense of superiority but in solidarity with all other creatures. We were created to be together, to be companions to one another, to thrive all together. All animals are our cousins, our kin. And God made a covenant with us and with all other animals together. Admit it, we humans are also animals, primate mammals.

And Jesus was a mammal. Jesus was born and lived in solidarity with all of life. Jesus lived to care about all who were oppressed and made vulnerable and marginalized by society; and right now that includes most creatures, not just humans. Jesus died in order that God might reconcile to God's self *all things* in creation (Col. 1:20).

In response to God's love, we are freed to behave in ways that enable all of life to thrive together. You do not need to prove anything. You can set limits on yourselves. You can simplify your lifestyle so that others may survive and thrive. You can become aware the effects of your actions on other creatures and curtail your activity. You can act to establish and restore safe homes and habitats for those animals that are endangered.

Now I want to address all of you creatures together. I had this vision in a dream during sleep at night. I was in the front row of a cathedral looking at the scene before me during a service of communion. I saw the priest passing bread to the first person kneeling at the communion railing. As I looked, the next figure at the railing was a snake! It was curled at the bottom with its back arching up over the rail and with head straining forward to receive the grace of Christ. The next figure was another person. Next was a raccoon with paws up on the communion rail leaning forward to receive the grace of Christ. Then I saw a bird perched on the corner of the railing eating bread crumbs.

As I finished surveying this scene in my dream, suddenly the side walls of the cathedral fell away and outside was thick foliage of forest and jungle on each side with all manner of wild animals roaming around. In this moment, it seemed as if walls of separation had been removed and there was a seamless web of all creation praising God and exalting in the grace of Christ.

From the time I awoke from that dream until this day, I have never been able to think of worship in the same way again. I now see all of Earth as the sanctuary in which we worship, and I see myself invoking and confessing and giving thanks and praising God and offering myself in solidarity with *all of life*. May that vision also be your vision.

You who are here today are very fortunate because you and have a relationship of love and care and loyalty between yourself and your human or your pet companion. You model how all relationships between humans and other animals should be. We wish to project this relationship as the model for our human relationship with all animals. May we care about all animals as we care for our companions at home.

I invite you all to come forward for a blessing. Sometimes when we have a service for the Blessing of the Animals, we

bless only the non-human animals, as if we ourselves are not also animals. Therefore, as an expression of solidarity with each other, I invite all of you—non-human animals and human animals alike—to come for a blessing together. We bless you as companions together and we bless your relationship:

“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.”
