

"Animals as Blessings"  
July 26, 2015

Genesis 1:24-25; 6:5-7, 17-20; 7:13-16; 8:24; 9:12-13  
Pastor Cathy Hamblin      Hayward United Methodist Church

**Call to Worship** Psalm 104:24-28

Lord, you have done so many things! You made them all so wisely! The earth is full of your creations!  
**And then there's the sea, wide and deep, with its countless creatures—living things both small and large.**

All your creations wait for you to give them their food on time.

When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled completely full!

Prayer of Invocation

**Dearest God, maker of all living creatures, we ask you to bless the animals that brings so much joy into our lives. By the power of Your love, send your Holy Spirit into our worship today. Blessed are You, God, in all Your creatures. Amen.**

The Word

**Genesis 1:24-25; 6:5-7, 17-20; 7:13-16; 8:24; 9:12-13**

God said, "Let the earth produce every kind of living thing: livestock, crawling things, and wildlife." And that's what happened. **God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was.**

[But before long] the LORD saw that humanity had become thoroughly evil on the earth and that every idea their minds thought up was always completely evil. The LORD regretted making human beings on the earth, and he was heartbroken. **So the LORD said, "I will wipe off of the land the human race that I've created: from human beings to livestock to the crawling things to the birds in the skies, because I regret I ever made them."**

"I am now bringing the floodwaters over the earth to destroy everything under the sky that breathes. Everything on earth is about to take its last breath. But I will set up my covenant with you. You will go into the ark together with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. **From all living things—from all creatures—you are to bring a pair, male and female, into the ark with you to keep them alive. From each kind of bird, from each kind of livestock, and from each kind of everything that crawls on the ground—a pair from each will go in with you to stay alive.**

That same day Noah, with his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, Noah's wife, and his sons' three wives, went into the ark. **They and every kind of animal—every kind of livestock, every kind that crawls on the ground, every kind of bird they came to Noah and entered the ark, two of every creature that breathes.**

Male and female of every creature went in, just as God had commanded him. Then the LORD closed the door behind them. The waters rose over the earth for one hundred fifty days. **God said, "This is the symbol of the covenant that I am drawing up between me and you and every living thing with you, on behalf of every future generation. I have placed my bow in the clouds; it will be the symbol of the covenant between me and the earth.**

Living the Word

The Word of God is divinely inspired; it has come to us through the generations of God's people as the story from Creation through the first Coming of Christ and all the way to predictions of the second Coming of Christ. We cannot date the origin of the events of Genesis and all of the stories until the timing of Abraham and Moses, which are counted by generations to be about 4000 years

ago. In fact, the first stories are called pre-history. They weren't recorded, but were stories told to explain the beginnings of humanity. Does that mean that they aren't true? There are most likely seeds of truth in them and more convincing to me, God has helped perpetuate and hold these stories for us, throughout history, so they must be of importance. We have been retelling the Creation story within our summer of blessings, as a reminder that God is the One who has given us all of our blessings, and that the blessings just keep on coming as we live into the Creation we have been given.

Genesis 1:24-25: *'God said, "Let the earth produce every kind of living thing: livestock, crawling things, and wildlife." And that's what happened. God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was.'* And the next verse: *'Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth.'"* According to the story we were and are to take charge of the animals.

So we come to the Noah story. How many of you remember the Noah story as the one we tell to the children with Noah building a big boat, large enough for two of each animal. Then it rained for 40 days, and the boat landed and the dove came back with a twig to say it was safe to get off the boat and then there was a beautiful rainbow which said that God would never flood the earth again?

What a great children's story. Hopefully as you got older you reread the story and know about the giants and the actual dimensions of this huge ark and about the people who were evil and how so many died in the flood. Not as happy a story, but filled with intrigue and a story much larger than life, literally.

This summer I have reviewed this story from two new perspectives. In the book: The Preservationist by David Maine; and the 2014 movie "Noah". Each has its own 'realities portrayed and I don't want to get into the specifics of either interpretation, but to say that how they handled all of the animals on a 5 month, enclosed ark, was interesting.

The book had loads of food brought on and animals on deck levels according to the animal food chain, so all would survive the trip. The movie had some sort of incense that put all of the animals into some type of hibernation sleep from the moment they found a place on the ark until they were ready to depart 5 months later on solid ground.

One story was about the animal's journey and the other was more about the human's journey. Both are fascinating, if you can allow yourself to remember it is the interpretation of a few people, of this epic story. No matter how the story is told it boils down to the premise that God loves God's creation, including the animals... especially the animals, and we are to care for them.

Lions and Tigers and Bears, Oh My! Lions and Tigers and Bears, Oh My! Why did God create and save for us the dangerous animals? For years we lived in unknowing fear of such creatures. In 1948 Disney opened up a new understanding of them in his "True-Life Adventure series" shown on Sunday evenings Television that ran new shows well into the 1960s and 70s.

We could now see live action of animals that we had only seen mean looking pictures of before then. Titles of 'Bear Country' 'The African Lion and his Realm' 'The Vanishing Prairie' 'The Olympic Elk' 'Elephants and Hippos in Africa' and many others helped us see the beauty of these animals, where they lived and how to appreciate and respect their place in our world. I remember sitting as a child

and watching in amazement as the cameras somehow got close enough to capture footage of their habitats and their play, as it happened.

Just a note about the Animal Food Chain. In the world today, we know that there are animals that depend on eating others to survive. It is all a part of God's plan for Creation...Or was it? Isaiah 11:6-7 tells us another story: *"The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion will feed together, and a little child will lead them. The cow and the bear will graze. Their young will lie down together, and a lion will eat straw like an ox."*

This gives us the picture of Eden as it once was in the Creation story.

The creatures shall be restored to that state of innocence in which they were before the fall of humanity. They will eat straw – the grass of the earth, as they did at first, and shall not devour other living creatures. Chapter 1 of Genesis ends in this way: *'To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food.'* *And that's what happened. God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good. There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.'*

Animals were not created with free will to make choices and decide things as humans were. They are ruled by their instincts, their senses their feelings and their routines. Yet those things each serve them well in their lives. An article from Women's Day, written by Kim Tranell begins like this: Your dog might not be able to talk to you about your bad day at work, but when he lays that little snout on your lap, you sense he just gets it. How much do we really know about what's going on behind those puppy-dog eyes? "A dog's mind is roughly equivalent to that of a human two-year-old's," says Stanley Coren, PhD, author of *The Intelligence of Dogs*.

"But dogs also have the social consciousness of a teenager." Put that together with a keen sense of smell, and dogs might be getting a basic read on everything from simple emotions to serious changes in your body chemistry. Here is a list of [8 Surprising Things Dogs Can Tell About You](#)

1. Dogs sense sadness. You swear your dog acts extra-tame and attentive when you're down in the dumps. Is it all in your head—or are your emotions registering on his radar? In a study published in the journal *Animal Cognition*, dogs did, in fact, approach people who appeared to be upset more often than those who weren't—whether it was their owner or a stranger.
2. They know when you're being unfair—to some extent. If you play favorites with another pet, your dog might notice, according to a study published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Researchers found that when dogs saw other dogs getting treats for a trick they'd been performing unrewarded, the uncompensated dogs became visibly distressed—scratching themselves, yawning, licking their mouths.
3. They can tell when your priorities shift. When you bring a baby home from the hospital, your pet probably won't be the focus of your undivided attention anymore. And guess what: He'll pick up on that pretty quickly. (It can even lead to depression, says Dr. Coren.)
4. They understand when you're mad. You know that puppy-dog look you get after giving him some discipline? He definitely senses you're annoyed, says Dr. Coren. "If you're angry at your dog, he'll act submissive—crouch down, whine, whimper."

5. They sense your fear. Let's say there's something menacing in your home, like a rodent or an intruder. As soon as you start giving off scared vibes, your pup will pick up on them.

6. They can tell if you're generous. Believe it or not, dogs are watching and listening to your social interactions with other humans—and taking note, according to one study out of the University of Milan. Researchers had dogs observe two actors: one who kindly shared his cereal and sausage bits with a beggar, and another who shooed off the beggar harshly. Scientists found that, more often than not, dogs approached the more generous person when prompted—and it seems that a friendlier tone of voice made a difference.

7. They sniff out sickness. Nope, it's not an urban legend. A slew of fascinating research shows that many diseases, like lung cancer and prostate cancer, cause the body to give off odors that dogs are able to detect. How, you ask? Depending on the chemical substance, a dog's nose is between 1,000 and 10,000 times better than a human being's. For instance, if he's sniffing that mole on your leg every day, it could be worth it to have your dermatologist check it out. We're not sure dogs know something's wrong, but they know something's different.

8. They know when you are (and aren't) paying attention. Before you leave a low-lying steak on the counter while you dash to the bathroom, consider this: Your pet is probably sneakier than you suspect. In one study, researchers placed treats on the floor in front of several dogs, forbidding them to eat the food. The dogs behaved as long as the person watching them stayed in the room—but when the treats-keeper left? The canines gobbled them up within five seconds.

This is not to say that you should or shouldn't go out and get a dog, or a pet. How many of you have seen the children in a waiting room observing their first fish tank of fish? They don't want to leave when it is time, because the fish aren't finished swimming...or the Aviary at a nursing home, which gives purpose to those elderly who cannot still care for a pet, but can still see God's handiwork in a small flock of birds as they sing and flutter around.

At the Hayward house we had a cat originally named "Buzz" (though Bob called her 'Cougar'). She was queen of the house and could be very demanding, but I didn't mind getting out of my chair when she whined to pour her some milk, because she brought me so much peace when she allowed me to pet her until she purred. She was soft and lazy and would just plop on my lap for a stay if I had time. Sometimes she would make a nest by pushing on my legs and circling once or twice before snuggling in.

We also loved the fact that when we got home from fishing, she was right there to 'help' Bob clean the fish and maybe capture a nibble or two. When our grandson Oliver was 3 years old, I would often stop by the fish tank at Walmart with him to watch for a minute. Those fish aren't going very far, but they are able to swim under water for long periods of time, and I can't do that without scuba gear. Watching the birds humans have learned how to fly, in planes of course, but way up in the air.

In many ways God has blessed us with the animal world. We are called to care for them...along with all of Creation. It is continual work to help fill and fulfill our lives.

PRAY