

Blessing of the Animals Reflection
Rev. Michael Poulos
First Presbyterian Church of Spruce Pine
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Job 12:7-10

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you, and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.

Matthew 6:25-29

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Did you know that the reason we are gathering here today is because of a man named Francis who lived in Italy 800 years ago? Christians around the world celebrate Saint Francis on October 4, the day after he died in 1226. He was born in the city of Asissi and is remembered for his love of God's creation and especially for his love for animals.

When you walk through the front doors of the church there is this small statue of Francis, and he is holding one of his favorite animals, a bird. Francis is known for his love of birds - he had a special relationship with them. He loved the bird lesson Jesus gives in the sermon on the mount that we heard this afternoon. "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your God in heaven feeds them."

The story is told that Francis' very first sermon was a sermon that he preached to the birds! When Francis noticed that a huge flock of birds had gathered in some trees beside a field, Francis walked over to them and shared the message of God's love. Though Francis did not write down his sermon, his biographers recorded the outline of his message:

"My brother birds, you should be praising your creator everywhere and always with love. Your creator God gave you your feathers for clothing, your wings to fly, and everything else that is necessary for your lives. It is God who has made you the most noble among all the creatures, gifting you with a home in the pure air itself. You don't have to sow or reap for your food - God protects and looks over you. You don't have to do anything!" (from *Francis of Assisi in His Own Words* by Jon M. Sweeney - audiobook)

I love how Francis calls the birds his brothers. Francis had a way of seeing all of creation as his siblings - brother sun, sister moon, all of us members of creation are part of God's family, and that is something we should celebrate. When you see the birds and cats, dogs and fish and rabbits not as things below you or things to manipulate or control, but rather treat them as siblings - partners in God's creation - then we are seeing the world like Saint Francis did! We are reminded of our divine calling to care and protect the animals and all of creation, to be open to learn from them.

Job speaks wisely when he says, “But ask the animals, and they will teach you, the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you, too... In God’s hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.”

We all belong to God and thus we belong to one another - if one part of us suffers, then we all suffer together. If we have learned anything about the groaning of creation and the climate crisis increasing across the globe, its that we are all part of an interconnected web - none of us are separate from each other - what affects the oceans and polar bears affect all of us, especially those who are among the most vulnerable in God’s creation.

So today, as we gather to celebrate the blessing that our pets are for us, thanking God for their companionship and their love - let us also remember the lessons that St Francis can teach us - that we have much to learn from the animals as well as from all of creation - that our calling is to learn to trust deeply in the One who has made us all, the One who loves us and the One who sustains us in all things. The song our kids are going to lead us next captures the mystery of this truth - that [all of us have a place in God’s choir](#) - and that all of us are needed to make creation sing God’s praise!