

Animals: Our Siblings in Christ

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Well, just sitting here as worship began, I thought, *you know, how many other jobs can you just take your dog to work with you like this?*

Also, I mean, how many other churches can you take your dog to church with you?

It is wonderful to be able to worship with Ginny as a representative of all of our fauna siblings. Sometimes this Sunday is also called Animal Sunday, but I think they call it Fauna Sunday to sound a little bit more scientific.

Fauna are animals, flora are plants, and I learned from Wikipedia that fungi are neither fauna nor flora. They have their own category called fungi, so now you know for your next trivia night.

So my question is: are humans fauna?

I think scientifically the answer would be yes. We are mammals. We need the same things that animals need. We don't photosynthesize and we're not mushrooms. So I think scientifically we fit in the fauna category.

Biblically, I don't know that we fit in the same category. I think many times you will hear that humans have been set apart from animals, that God created us separately. In one of our creation stories, we hear that we were made in God's image. In the second

creation story, humans were made first and then we're there to caretake for the rest of Creation.

Why are we separate? For what purpose? Historically, it's been because we are in charge, and we get to do what we want. The world is ours for the taking.

But now—as we are in what scientists call the Anthropocene, a new age characterized by what humans have done and are doing—maybe we can restructure our relationship to the other animals that we share this planet with.

Martin Luther would say in his works that humans are set apart not because we are smarter; not because we can use logic; and not because we use memory—Luther argues that Satan can do all of those things, too. Luther argues that **we are set apart because we can relate to creation like God relates to creation.**

In our reading from Job, Job has been calling out to God and saying, *this is not fair. I am struggling. Where are you?*

He has a valid point, but God comes to him with this list of things that Job does not understand and cannot control. God points to nature, to creation, to donkeys and eagles and oxen. Job doesn't know where they give birth, what their life cycles are like, where they live.

They are wild and free and outside of human control, and God delights in them—not because they are there for humans to use, or for human flourishing—God loves these things that God has

made because they are precious. These wild things—that do not benefit us in any way—we are to take delight in them.

In Psalm 104, we hear how we are to be filled with awe at the many things that God has made. Not just because they feed us, or not just because they're beautiful for their own sakes, or because they're super fluffy and loving and beautiful. We are called to love creation the way God loves creation, because God made it.

Ginny agrees. Right, Ginny? (It's nice having a little commentary up here).

Luke also reminds us this as Jesus returns from the dead. Jesus shows up in various places, and people can barely believe it. They don't believe it at first, even as more and more evidence mounts. But as Jesus comes back, his first instructions are to **proclaim the good news to the whole creation. Not just to your fellow humans, but to all the world, to everything in it.**

Jesus says that following him will have these signs, this fruit that they will bear. And the signs are that we will be united even more with the animal world, right? That they will be able to handle snakes and not be harmed. That they will even more a part of everything that God has made, which is so important right now to remember.

Creation is in much need of good news. It is also hurting. It is also broken. Animals are very much in need of good news right now.

It seems almost every day you can just read in the news something about how the animal kingdom is hurting. Whether that's the decline of the honeybee population, or another disease outbreak—like swine flu or bird flu—that means a whole bunch of animals need to be killed, or an algae bloom kills all the fish in a certain area.

All the time, we can hear the ways that we are harming the fauna around us. The fauna is crying out to God. **God, who offers healing and love and care and saving power, not just for humans, but for everything.**

So, what does it look like to proclaim good news to all creation?

Something more than *God loves you* is needed right now.

Something more than *all dogs go to heaven*.

Something more than just *Jesus rose from the dead*.

When Jesus was proclaiming good news, it was those things: Jesus healed the sick and befriended the ostracized and fed the hungry, and he called his followers to do the exact same thing. **The good news that Jesus calls us to proclaim is not just words, but also action.**

What would it look like to go forth today to proclaim good news to all creation?

Maybe it would look like finding out more where our food comes from and making choices about where we buy it and how it's produced.

Maybe it means trying to use less plastic, reducing our footprint on this earth.

Maybe it looks like advocating for restoring habitat in the area instead of just letting everything be destroyed.

Maybe it looks like avoiding poisons and pesticides as we try to share our living space with the animals around us.

Maybe it looks like advocating and organizing.

Maybe it looks like caring for the animals that are in our control and trying to care for the animals that are outside of our control.

What would it look like to treat animals like our siblings in Christ, delighting in them for their own sakes and not just for what they can do for us?

Good news for the animals is good news for us as well, concrete good news that we will need.

Clean water for animals to drink is clean water for us to drink.

Restored habitats for animals to live in is restored habitat for us to enjoy and rejoice in.

Clean air for animals to breathe is clean air for us to breathe.

Good news for fauna is good news for us because we are created and we are related we are the same. So, as we're surrounded today by our one animal representative, as we go home, as we

see our other animal representatives, as we delight in the things that God has made always surrounding us, may we continue to proclaim good news that the whole earth again resounds with praise.

Thanks be to God.