



Care for God's Creatures

Furry, feathered, finned, four-legged, and winged, the diversity of God's creatures inspires wonder and awe. From Noah's Ark, to barn animals surrounding baby Jesus, to Isaiah's vision of the lion dwelling with the lamb, God's creatures play an important role in the Bible. In the psalms, creatures give praise to God, having their own relationship with God separate from humanity. Thus, knowing and loving God's creatures helps us better know our Creator.

While Genesis 2:1-15 calls humans to till and keep creation, Genesis 1 calls us to also marvel at and love

all creatures.¹ The seven days of creation narrative does not inspire a spirit of superiority, a distance, of domination, or of exploitation. The seven days narrative is inspired by, testifies to, and hopes to inspire a spirit immediately seized by divine love... For the seven days narrative calls us to love as God loves. It calls us to godly dominion.² Non-human creatures enrich our human vocation, teach us about God, and companion us on life's journeys. We give thanks for all God's creatures and devote ourselves to better care of, and relationship with, these creatures.

*How great are Your works, O God! You made them all
with wisdom, the earth is full of Your creatures*

Background

In Genesis 1:26, God completes the sixth day of creation and declares that humans should have dominion over “fish in the sea and birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” In this vision, humans are to work for the care, wellbeing, and freedom of God’s creatures. Unfortunately, in too many cases, humankind has engaged in domination, rather than careful dominion.³ Today, we must work to restore right relationship with God’s creatures.

Faithful Companions

One of the most intimate ways many of us get to know God’s creatures is through our relationships with pets. Accepting responsibility to feed, exercise, and maintain the health of another creature is one way to live out the Genesis call to dominion. Being the caretaker of a pet is a significant responsibility that lasts for the duration of a pet’s life. Yet, we get a lot from keeping pets. Pets can be educational as they teach empathy and other life lessons. They teach reciprocity of relationship. Pets are also therapeutic—from providing opportunities for calming touch, laughter at their antics, or even interaction as trained therapy animals. Quality time with pets reminds us that we, too, are God’s embodied creatures who need care and playtime. Pets are often adept at demonstrating how to embrace Sabbath time, appreciate a good meal, express joy, or show affection.

Has spending time with one of God’s creatures taught you anything about yourself?

The Humility to Learn from Other Creatures

God’s creatures can be spiritual teachers. Each creature demonstrates a set of virtues we can admire: the teamwork of the ant, the loyalty of the elephant, the playfulness of the dolphin. Creatures can also help us find technical solutions to problems. We can learn from ways creatures facilitate chemical reactions without emitting toxic pollution, or how ecosystems ensure nothing is wasted. Chemists and engineers are increasingly becoming interested in bio-mimicry, imitating nature’s solutions to technical problems. Find a video about bio-mimicry at www.creationjustice.org/creatures.

Do you have a problem, either spiritual or technical, that one of God’s creatures might give you insights into solving?



Ecosystems: God’s Elegant and Fragile Web of Life

Creation thrives on diversity. Ecosystems are elegant interconnected feedback loops where nothing is wasted. Each creature has intrinsic worth and serves a purpose in an ecosystem.

Today, the average person who lives in the United States spends the vast majority of their time indoors. It is easy to forget that we are part of an ecosystem and that we depend on it. Remembering the needs—and the value—of an ecosystem is not easy when we feel disconnected from the natural world. Meanwhile, valuable habitats have been lost forever because developers failed to consider the true costs. Now, scientists and economists are identifying a financial value of the natural world: ecosystem services. Find a video about ecosystem services at www.creationjustice.org/creatures.

What is the gift that one of God’s creatures is to you? How would you describe that gift’s value?

¹Greenway, William N A Jr. “To love as God loves: the spirit of dominion.” *Review & Expositor* 108, no. 1 (2011): 86.

²Greenway, William N A Jr. “To love as God loves: the spirit of dominion.” *Review & Expositor* 108, no. 1 (2011): 101.

³Greenway, William NA Jr. “To love as God loves: the spirit of dominion,” *Review and Expositor* 108, no.1 (2011): 23-36.

Endangered Species

Scientists are telling us Earth is in the middle of a mass extinction event. Over-fishing and over-hunting, habitat destruction, climate change, and other factors now threaten the existence of one in five species. When a species becomes extinct, the wisdom that creature could impart, all the creature gave to its ecosystem, and the particular way it glorified God by its very existence is lost forever. As God has charged us with dominion, species protection is in our hands.

In the United States, the Endangered Species Act has served as the “Noah’s ark” of our time, ensuring protection for creatures in peril. The ark in the Genesis flood narrative is how, God “remembers” (i.e., holds, keeps, protects, cares for) “all the wild animals and all the domestic animals” (Gen. 8:1). Today, we are called to be mindful of all creatures, and to take stock of their presence.

How will we find ways to prioritize other species? Will we do this at the expense of human convenience or material advantage?

“The fate of humans and the fate of the animals are the same: as one dies so does the other; both have the same breath.” Ecclesiastes 3:19

BIBLE STUDY & SERMON STARTERS

Our Place in Creation

In Genesis 1 humanity was given responsibility over “the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26).

God told Job to go to animals for wisdom, “Ask the beasts, and let them teach you; and the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you” (12:7) and remonstrated Job with the details of how God created all that exists (38-39). Jesus lifts up God’s care for the birds of the air to demonstrate God’s certain care for humans (Matthew 6:26-30). Perhaps humans were created last in Genesis and added last to the praise chorus in Psalm 148 to remind us, as Job was reminded, that we are not the center of the universe.

Let All that Have Breath Praise God

In Genesis 1 “in the beginning” God created the heavens and the earth, birds and sea monsters, cattle and creeping things, and finally humanity—and called it all very good. Psalm 148 remembers the order of God’s creative process, celebrates the goodness of creation, and calls all creation to praise the Creator. In Psalm 148, “Young men and women

alike, old and young together” join in praise with “sea monsters and wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds” because “God commanded and they were created.” The voices in the chorus of praise include not only people and creatures, but also the sun, moon and stars, water and mountains, trees and weather. The circle of praise grows with every line to encompass all that God created in heaven and on earth.

QUERIES

In Quaker traditions, queries are a tool to spur reflection, both alone and shared.

Does our reverence for God include reverence for God’s creatures?

Do we live in respectful relationship with non-human life? How can we build a cooperative inter-reliance with other species?

Can we release our commerce-driven timelines to live with a better sense of life cycles and seasons within community?

“If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature—even a caterpillar—I would never have to prepare a sermon, so full of God is every creature.” Meister Eckhardt

FEATURED CREATURES

Take action for creatures at: www.creationjustice.org/creatures

Porcupine Caribou of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

For centuries, the Gwich'in people have lived alongside the porcupine caribou and relied on them for sustenance. The Gwich'in people call the caribou's birthing grounds “the sacred place where life begins.” Caribou have become scarce as they face the dual threats of climate change and habitat disruption. Christian communities stand with the Gwich'in people to protect their ancestral home and the caribou.

Bats

We are called to love all God's creatures, but some find it difficult to love bats. Historically, bats invoked reactions of fear. Yet the truth is that bats do a lot of good and little to no harm. Today, bats are struggling for their lives against climate change, habitat loss, and a fungal disease called white nose syndrome. Churches and home owners can mount bat houses outdoors, and plant night-blooming flowers. Luckily for us, bats enjoy eating mosquitos!



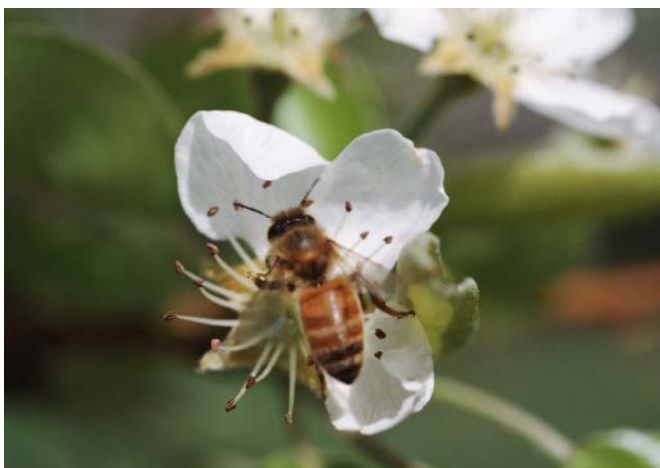
Bees

Our access to food and clean air is directly connected to the wellbeing of bees. Yet, these humble pollinators are in big trouble. Habitat destruction, pesticides, air pollution, and climate change threaten their survival.

We can help bees by reducing the amount of toxic pesticides we use—both as individuals and as a society. In particular, watch out for anything labeled as a “neonicotinoid,” which is a known toxin to honeybees. It is also helpful to mitigate loss of safe food sources for bees by planting gardens with native plants, which can nourish a diversity of pollinators.

Chicken, cows, fish and more

Some Christians abstain from eating animals and animal products, and others make careful choices to only consume animals that were raised sustainably and ethically. Current factory-farming and feedlots can lead to situations of animal abuse that fly in the face of God's care and intention for God's creatures. We can learn from many cultures—including biblical ancestors—to honor the life of animals, to embrace ethical principles related to eating them, and to give humble thanks for any sacrifice of life.



A BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS CEREMONY

One: We gather here today in the beauty of creation and give thanks that we have been made partners in the caretaking of this world. We gather here today alongside the creatures of the earth; Those that fly overhead, Those that creep below on the ground, Those who bring joy to our homes, Those that fill us with awe and delight.

Many: We gather here today as a part of creation, filled with the breath of God and made of the dust of the earth.

One: May God bless the animals of the earth and sea and air with security of habitat, plentiful food and clean water. May God bless creatures that are endangered with our concern and protection. May God bless our efforts to ensure that no creature is exploited or forgotten.

Many: We ask God's blessings for all creatures of the earth, those known to us and those yet to be discovered.

One: May God bless the animals that provide service to us. Protect animals that assist our police and armed forces, as well as those who serve the blind and those with physical or mental illness.

Many: We ask God's blessing for the interdependent web of creation, and to make us mindful of all the ways we depend on animals.

One: May God bless companion animals. We give thanks for the comfort, play, and joy they bring us. May God bless the memories of beloved pets that have died.

Many: We ask God to keep all of creation in divine arms of redemptive love.

Many: May God make us instruments of God's peace; Where there is hatred, let us sow love; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; Where there is sadness, joy.

All: Let us be a consoling, understanding, loving, and forgiving people toward all of God's creation.

A Time of Blessing

Congregants are invited to bring a pet, or a photo of a pet (living or passed), for a blessing. Children may bring a stuffed animal if they wish.



Bishop Richard Graham of the DC Metro Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America blesses Hopper.

TAKE ACTION

Find resources at www.creationjustice.org/creatures

Be aware of your role and choices in the eco-system

Mindfulness that we are part of an interdependent web of life is the first step. Go outside. Start a nature journal. Local wildlife and watershed groups as well as national, state, and local park leaders can help. Go to www.findyourpark.org to make the connection.

Consider your lifestyle choices and what impact they have on God's creatures: what you buy, what you eat, where you build, where you vacation. Discern areas where you can improve your role and relationship with animals.



Kids participate in building a bat house.

Engage in creature counting

Scientists need help understanding what is happening to God's creatures. Engage in species observation and counting through your local wildlife or watershed organization. Let us know at info@creationjustice.org.

Create habitat at church and at home.

Build a bat house. Installing a bat house on church or home property provides habitat, and natural mosquito control.

Plant a garden to feed pollinators. This balances natural beauty with meeting food and habitat needs for bees, butterflies and more.

Pray and speak for threatened and endangered species.

Get on Social Media: Howl, roar, hoot, splash, and hiss for God's threatened and endangered species. Take a photo or video of animal noises to "speak for" an endangered species you care about. Post to [#BlesstheAnimals](https://twitter.com/BlesstheAnimals) and [#EndangeredSpecies](https://twitter.com/EndangeredSpecies). Tag Creation Justice Ministries [@CreationJustice](https://twitter.com/CreationJustice) so we can share it.

Host a Blessing of the Animals: While suitable for any time of year, many Christian communities organize them in honor of the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi in October. Share photos at [#BlesstheAnimals](https://twitter.com/BlesstheAnimals)

Contact policy-makers. Policy-makers at every level need to hear about protecting God's creatures. Advocate for the Endangered Species Act, for better animal welfare standards in the food industry, for laws that prevent seafood fraud and combat over-fishing, and for conservation of habitats, and more.



Each year, Creation Justice Ministries offers resources to equip churches to celebrate Earth Day. Creation Justice Ministries educates, equips, and mobilizes its 38 member communions and denominations, congregations, and individuals to do justice for God's planet and God's people. Learn more at www.creationjustice.org



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

We are a church that believes God is calling us into the world—together. We work through our local congregations, synods, partners and churchwide ministries to protect, renew and restore God's creation. Together, we achieve things on a scale and scope that we could never do otherwise.

Learn more at www.elca.org/Resources/Caring-for-Creation, and visit www.ELCA.org/advocacy to join a growing network of ELCA advocates voicing the importance for public policy that protects our vulnerable neighbors and God's creation.



Call to Worship

One: Let us worship God together. Let us sing to the Lord a new song; A song for and with all the creatures of the earth.

Many: Let us rejoice in what God has created. It is good!

One: Let us marvel at the creatures that are wonderful in God's sight.

Many: Let us extol God's handiwork.

One: Lord, help to us wonder and to stand in awe at the richness of the world before us. Every creature gives you praise.

Prayers of the Faithful

In lament for what we have done, or what we have failed to do, for endangered species that are struggling to survive: We pray for creatures that have been endangered for the sake of profit, for creatures killed by environmental disasters wrought by human carelessness, and for animals that have lost their habitat.

R: God, hear our prayers.

With concern for animals that suffer in unhealthy environments, for animals neglected and ill-treated, for animals inhumanely raised in factory farms, for homeless animals that face euthanasia.

R: God, hear our prayers.

We acknowledge the beauty of God's diverse and wondrous creatures and that God made them all in wisdom.

R: God, hear our prayers.

In gratitude for service animals that offer protection and for pets that bring us comfort,

R: God, hear our prayers.

Prayer of Confession

Let us pray.

Compassionate God, we too often ignore the cries and suffering of your creatures. Our lives are bound up with other species and we ask your forgiveness for the ways we mistreat your creation. Give us clean hearts and caring hands, O God. Remind us that we too are creatures, interdependent and vulnerable. Amen.

Assurance

God declares the creation good. We are among God's creatures, and humbled that God calls on us to till and keep the earth. With hope and inspiration to answer that call, we place our trust in God to show us the way.



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