

**Sermon Proper 22 Oct 2 2016 Year "C"**  
**Saint Barnabas Church, Bainbridge Island**  
**Blessing of the Animals**

*Heavenly Creator, you make all things for your glory*

*And you make us caretakers of creation.*

*Keep the animals, the birds, the fish and insects always under your loving protection.*

*Blessed are you, Lord God, and holy is your name for ever and ever. Amen.*

Major healing is needed on this planet, this fragile earth, our island home. The healing of our relationship to creation is urgent and may even be paramount the healing of all other relationships..

The creative, redeeming, sustaining and reconciling power we call God and define as Love created our planet out of stardust and from the beginning appointed humans to be stewards to watch over and care for it.

Stewardship of creation requires us to live responsibly from within it, rather than managing creation as though we were outside it. We are stewards within creation, not separated from it. We are part of the ecosystem, we are not proud masters over and above it.

We must commit ourselves to live in reconciliation as caretakers for all of life and for our planet itself.

Today we remember and honor Saint Francis of Assisi by blessing animals under our care. We treasure Francis for the way he saw himself as a simple servant and a caretaker of creation. He addressed creatures as "sister" and "brother" because he saw them as equals, equally valuable to the creator, not as subjects to be dominated. John Paul II called Francis "an example of genuine and deep respect for the integrity of creation." "St. Francis," he said, "invited all creation – animals, plants, natural forces even Brother Sun and Sister Moon – to give honor and praise to the Lord."

In his famous poem "Canticle of the Creatures" where he praises the creatures and the constellations, the four elements of earth, water, wind, and fire, he even calls bodily death "sister" because he recognizes her as friend in this life, a reminder of what is essential. Toward the end of his life, no longer able to see, Francis described nature as a *theophany*, a place of divine encounter and intimate relationship.

Francis had come to see there is only one family of creation and all creatures are included in the family. First, the creation stories found in Genesis 1 and 2 reveal God's participation in all of life. Second the message of Jesus, St. John, St. Paul, and the mystical author of the Book of the Revelation repeatedly tell us God intends the whole created world to share in God's saving plan. All being is to be reconciled to one another in and through its reconciliation to the creator of all.

The story of Noah and the Ark is simple and familiar. We tell it to children, but as we mature, our appreciation of its deeper meaning grows. The ark is a wonderful symbol of God's desire to save the whole family of creation. It is not God's plan to save humankind apart from other creatures. God, through Noah, reveals we are all in the same boat, humans and other creatures alike.

God shows his love and care in asking Noah to bring aboard the ark "every kind" of creature. They should be "male and female" alike, insuring the continuation and propagation of each of the species. And Noah is to take with him "every kind of food". "Store it up," says the Lord, "and it shall serve for food for you and for them."

Noah's righteousness truly imitates the righteousness of God. God's care is focused not only upon the human family but upon the whole family of creation as well. The animals and other creatures are now part of Noah's "household" and in his care, just as they have always been under God's loving care. To reflect

the image of the broad solicitude of our Creator, humans must care not only for other human beings, but also for the earth and for the wider family of creation.

In The Revelation to John, the final book of the Bible, the author tells of an amazing vision he received while imprisoned on the Greek island of Patmos. He saw and “heard” every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe cry out: “To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever. (Rev.5:13)

Near the end, he shares one final vision “I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” This image of “a new heaven and a new earth” reminds us of the original Garden of Paradise. Just as there was a freshly created garden in the first book of the Bible, so there is a second garden in the final book of the Bible.

Biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson wrote: “As Genesis began with creation by a word, so the vision of the end-time [in the book of The Revelation] recapitulates that beginning: creation is renewed.”

We are compelled by the Biblical story and the presence of God in and through creation to join with our creator to renew the face of the earth, to use our minds, our science, our creativity to preserve, protect and care for the earth and all life abiding on it.

We do well to plant eel grass. We do well to remove unnecessary dams and culverts, to let the streams flow freely and to support salmon spawning. We do well to study the language whales use to communicate with one another and we must protect them from human sponsored noise in the ocean whenever possible. We do well to recognize whales protect smaller sea mammals from shark attacks. We do well to provide sanctuaries for migratory birds. We do well to accept the natural erosion of hillsides and cliffs and to make wise decisions about where we build. We do well to study the climate and the effects of climate change.

The next generation will have so many exciting opportunities to study and learn about the natural world. May they always see it with the loving eyes of the artist and poet God who called it into being.

*Blessed are you, Lord God, Poet and Artist of all creation.  
We ask you to bless the animals and plants and rocks and seas surrounding us.  
By the power of your love, enable all to live according to your plan.  
May we always praise you for the majesty we meet in creation.  
Blessed are you, Lord our God, and holy is your name for ever and ever. Amen.*

**The Blessing:**

**Live without fear. Your Creator loves you, made you holy, and has always protected you. Go in peace to follow the good road, and may God’s blessing be with you always.**

*The Rt. Rev. Mark Sisk, Episcopal Bishop of New York*