

Creation 2 (Animals) Year C; 21 / 22 September 2019
St. James' Episcopal Church, Clinton NY
The Reverend Gary Cyr

“God is the author of all that is – seen and unseen. God provides for each aspect of creation according to its need. The challenge is to become more aware of life’s sacredness and how we coexist with what sustains us.”

Job 39: 1-12
1 Corinthians 1: 10-23
Luke 12: 22-31
Psalm 104: 14-23, 32

Jesus says: do not worry. I say: really? It is late Thursday evening when I look over the bulletin for the weekend’s service and notice that I am in the preaching slot when all week I was working under the assumption that a lay person was doing the sermon. Imagine my surprise when it is confirmed that I am indeed scheduled to craft and deliver the sermon. It is too late that evening to begin the prep work much less start writing a rough draft. Do not worry indeed – I had other words for Jesus that evening.

Worry is something all of us do, even though we know there is very little we can do to change an outcome once something is put in motion. Most of us have experienced anxiety (a more clinical term for worry) in its many forms: Will the project work? Am I dressed appropriately for the interview? Will I say the right things? Will my parents like the friend I am bringing home? The list of questions is almost endless. Try as we may, anxiety is part and parcel of life. Thus, we are prone to worry, even about the littlest of things.

However, there is a common remedy that is often prescribed for those of us who suffer with anxiety: get a pet – preferably, a dog (sorry cat people, I am a dog person, but felines are great too). It has been proven countless times that dogs are very therapeutic and relaxing. I have had three faithful furry companions in my life thus far, and each of them taught me much about life. Most of all, they taught me about forgiveness and unconditional love. Hallmarks and attributes I associate with God. Though they were dependent upon me, as all pets are on their

human companions, they are not overly concerned with appearances or wealth, success or failure, or any number of conditions we place on our happiness and joy. In other words, they do not judge us. They simply accept us as we are. Pets, animals, have much to teach us about moral virtue and God's abundant, forgiving, unconditional love.

A few years ago, a movie came out titled "*Samsara*" which chronicles the suffering that eclipses all life. The film traces life from birth to death to re-birth. It is a beautiful film, that is, until it exposes the brutal truth of industrial farming, in particular, cattle and chicken farms. Most of us do not give it a second thought when we go to the grocery store for meat, or fish, or dairy products. We have become so far removed from our food source that most folks do not know where their food comes from, and the film *Samara* exposes how true that is. As such, I am much more conscientious in my choices when I shop seeking products that treat animals humanely and ethically when its life is taken for my sustenance. After all, all life, as the author of Luke's gospel tells us, is precious in the eyes of its Creator. Yet, the world exploits it all, and for what?

Is it so we can maintain our conveniences? Does one need a hunting trophy to hang on a wall? Or, it might be argued, people need work and there is profit in feeding the masses. Whether its industrial farming or hunting for sport, we have a moral obligation to treat the animals which share this earth with us with compassion and care, with dignity. It is indeed the natural order that species prey upon each other for nourishment. Everything is in a proper balance. That is how eco-systems work. Humankind, however, seems bent on disrupting that balance for its own sake, and in the process of that, disregarding the truth that life is a gift from a Creator God, and that this life honors God in it's simply being what it is created to be.

How many species have we hunted into extinction? How many creatures have been eradicated in the name of the industrialization of farmland and farm animals? How many abandoned pets are euthanized every day in our nation? I shudder to think how many. Strive for the kin-dom of God, the gospel says, and all that you need will be given to you. Exploitation seems to be our only reply.

Today's readings remind us that we do not know everything. When God questions Job, God is seeking to explore how little understanding we really have of the divine force that

surrounds us and imbues all life with sacredness. God is the author of all that is – seen and unseen. God provides for each aspect of creation according to its need. The challenge is to become more aware of life's sacredness and how we coexist with what sustains us. That is the heart of Creation Season and today's readings help us focus on the animals that share the earth, our island home in the vast expanse of the cosmos.

The 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church sanctioned for trial use, a sixth vow to our Baptismal Covenant that reads: "Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect the beauty and integrity of all creation?" To which we reply, "I will, with God's help." That is the question scripture puts before us today: Will we care for the animals that grace our lives, provide nourishment for our bodies, and nurture our souls?

I do worry about how we answer that question; for how we answer determines the gift we leave our great-great-grandchildren. In the parlance of the Native peoples of these lands, Tread lightly upon the earth so as to not leave a footprint. And in light of the Iroquois Nations' philosophy [may] the decisions we make today result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future.

"Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect the beauty and integrity of all creation?"