

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – Year B – Blessing of the Animals

I am so happy that today we are celebrating the blessing of the animals, the blessing of our companions of other species. And the reason I am so delighted is that I think it helps us – or at least it helped me – look at our readings today from a different perspective – and I’m all about seeing from a different perspective!

When the clergy of our central region gathered this past week at St. Andrew’s in Grand Rapids, as we do monthly, there was a great deal of discussion about these readings. Mostly I think folks were trying to figure out a way how NOT to talk about divorce. But from my first reading of the texts for this week, perhaps because of the context of the socio-political angst overwhelming us these days, they have spoken to me about the consequences of our worldview and our notions of domination.

I think the text from Genesis – and Jesus quoting it in the Gospel – take us to a discussion of right relationship – relationships between people, and the relation of humanity to the rest of creation.

There is a weekly Catholic publication from the UK that Barbara Sheperdigian’s son sends to her, which she passes on to someone else, which eventually often makes its way to our house – and into the reading rack in our bathroom. I know – more than you wanted to know. But God has a sense of humor and great timing. And so this week, four months after it appeared in the Tablet, I read an article that framed these readings and our blessing of the animals for me.

The text from our opening hymn in part was no doubt inspired by Coleridge’s poem, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” Anglican priest Malcolm Guite, in an article in the Tablet, says, “One of the most important questions that Coleridge raises, both in the ‘Rime’ and in his later theological writing, is ‘what is our proper relation to the natural world?’ Is it a sacred web of exchange of which we are only one small part, or is it simply an agglomeration of ‘stuff’, which we can use at will for our own purposes?” The writer distinguishes between an

instrumental view of nature – which says the value of any created thing is determined by its usefulness to *me* – and a *sacral* view of creation – which says that all of creation has value because of the Creator. After all sorts of disaster and angst described in poem, the Mariner experiences a transformation that leads him to look at all of creation, not as his to use for his own benefit or desire, but as companions from the one Creator of all. The verse that we hold in the hymn text is this:

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

I believe that our worldview, our view of creation – whether instrumental or sacral – significantly affects how we live, how we relate to one another, what we deem moral. When I read the Genesis stories about creation and see in them justification for humanity's *domination* over the rest of creation, when I read this Gospel passage and other Scriptures and use them as justification for one gender or one person to have control or dominance over another, I am not in line with what Jesus tells us again and again about the nature and the heart of God. If you are feeling broken, wounded, heartsick over the events of the recent past in our nation and around the world, it is because your heart – wherein the heart of God also dwells – knows we are living out of the wrong worldview. We need to find our way back – or perhaps put better, to open ourselves to the vision of God, the view that sees all of creation interrelated, all of it good.

Jesus tells us, “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

As a little child – without status, without dominance, knowingly dependent on others.

That's why these dogs and cats and turtles and all our creature companions of other species are so important to us: They, too, are without status, knowingly dependent on others. They have lessons to teach us, about how to be faithful, how to forgive, how to live in the present moment. They can teach us how to be in right relationship, if we let them.

And so let us now take them into our arms and bless them, and thank God for loaning them to us as companions on our journey.

Amen.

[Genesis 2:18-24](#)

[Psalm 8](#)

[Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12](#)

[Mark 10:2-16](#)