

BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS

Genesis 1:1a, 11-13,20-31

Canticle 12

John 1:1-5

OCTOBER 3, 2010

St. Matthew's Church

Chesterfield, Virginia

“IN THE BEGINNING WHEN GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH” – .
 SO BEGINS GENESIS 1. WE THEN SKIPPED OVER THE CREATION OF THE LAND, THE
 SEA, THE HEAVENS WITH THE SUN, MOON AND STARS. WE KNOW THE ACCOUNT. WE
 MOVED RIGHT TO THE CREATION OF LIVING THINGS.

THE PLANTS – TREES – FRUIT – SEEDS

CREATURES OF EVERY KIND –

SEA MONSTERS, FISH, FROM TINY TO HUGE

WINGED BIRDS IN THE AIR

CATTLE, WILD ANIMALS WHO WALKED UPON THE EARTH

CREEPING THINGS TOO

FINALLY HUMANKIND, MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.

JOHN 1 BEGINS A SIMILAR WAY – “IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD AND THE
 WORD WAS GOD. HE WAS IN THE BEGINNING WITH GOD. ALL THINGS CAME INTO
 BEING THROUGH HIM AND WITHOUT HIM NOT ONE THING CAME IN TO BEING. WHAT
 HAS COME INTO BEING IN HIM WAS LIFE, AND THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF ALL
 PEOPLE.”

WHEN PLACED SIDE BY SIDE THESE TWO “CREATION” STORIES HAVE
 ENORMOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR US – BOTH AS HUMAN BEINGS AND AS FOLLOWERS
 OF JESUS CHRIST.

IN GENESIS 1 GOD GIVES TO HUMANKIND DOMINION OVER ALL THE EARTH
 AND ITS CREATURES. IF WE PARSE THE HEBREW WORD FOR DOMINION – *RĀDĀ* WE
 QUICKLY SEE THAT IT IS NOT A DOMINION OF EXPLOITATION AND POWER – A DOING
 OF WHAT I WANT TO DO IT TO BENEFIT ME AND MINE; INSTEAD IT IS A DOMINION IN
 THE SENSE OF CARING FOR AND TENDING CREATION. HUMAN BEINGS ARE CALLED

”TO RELATE TO THE NONHUMAN AS GOD RELATES TO HUMANS”.¹ IT IS A CALL TO BE STEWARDS, CARETAKERS OF CREATION – TO FOR CARE AND TEND – CREATION. WHEN WE CONSIDER THAT WE BELIEVE IN GOD AS CREATOR AND FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR – THE VERY SON OF GOD WHO WAS PRESENT AT CREATION – WE’RE DOUBLY CALLED TO TEND ALL OF CREATION.

RECENTLY I READ AN ARTICLE ABOUT JANE GOODALL, WORLD RENOWN PRIMATOLOGIST (ONE WHO STUDIES PRIMATES – APES, MONKEYS ETC). FOR THE PAST 50 YEARS SHE HAS STUDIED APES IN AFRICA AND LIVED AMONG THEM. GOODALL HAS LEARNED MUCH ABOUT PRIMATES. SHE’S COME A TO REALIZATION THAT ANIMALS HAVE FEELINGS – KNOWING PAIN, GRIEF, JOY. THEY MAY NOT HAVE A DEVELOPED MORAL SENSE, BUT THEY CANNOT BE TREATED AS IF THEY ARE COMMODITIES OR THINGS. ONE OF HER CRITICISMS OF TODAY’S CULTURE IS THAT, WE HAVE LOST WISDOM! WE HAVE FORGOTTEN TO CONSIDER WHAT EFFECTS OUR ACTIONS WILL HAVE TO FUTURE GENERATIONS². LIKE GOODALL, NATIVE AMERICANS BELIEVE THAT WE NEED TO CONSIDER OUR ACTIONS TODAY AND THEIR EFFECT ON THE EARTH AND ITS CREATURES TO THE 7TH GENERATION.

WE’RE CALLED NOT TO TAKE AND TAKE FROM CREATION, BUT TO FIND WAYS TO TEND IT, ENHANCE IT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS. WE’RE TO TAKE OUR INTELLECT, OUR CREATIVITY AND WITH GOD BE CO-CREATORS. THE CHOICE IS ALWAYS BEFORE US – TO ENLARGE, ENHANCE, BEAUTIFY FOR THOSE WHO COME AFTER US OR TO CONTINUE TO TAKE IT ALL NOW AND LEAVE LITTLE FOR THE FUTURE.

GOD IN CHRIST HAS GIVEN US A BOUNTIFUL AND WONDERFUL PLANET ON WHICH TO LIVE. AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST WE NEED TO CONSIDER DAILY WHAT

¹ New Interpreter’s Bible, vol I. Abingdon Press, Nashville, p. 346

² (Edward Klein, “Call of the Wild”, Reader’s Digest. August 2010, pp.128-35)

OUR PART SHOULD BE IN BEING GOOD STEWARDS OF CREATION. IF WE CARED FOR ALL OF GOD’S CREATION AS WE CARE FOR OUR OWN PETS—FISH, RABBITS, GERBILS, DOGS, CATS, HORSES ETC. THIS WORLD WOULD BE A VERY DIFFERENT PLACE.

ONE BISHOP (Rt Rev William G. Burrill, retired Dio Rochester NY) WE KNOW SPEAKS OF STEWARDSHIP “AS BEING EVERYTHING THAT WE DO AFTER WE SAY, ‘I BELIEVE’.” OUR TASK IS TO CARE FOR CREATION – THE EARTH, ALL LIVING CREATIONS BEGINS WHEN WE ARE BAPTIZED AND CONTINUES ON THROUGH OUR ENTIRE LIFE.

STEWARDSHIP IS SO MUCH MORE THAN A FALL STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN – WHEN WE EACH DECIDE HOW TO SUPPORT OUR PARISH. IT IS REALLY ABOUT HOW WE LIVE OUR LIFE – WHAT OUR PRIORITIES ARE – HOW WE TAKE CARE OF OUR SMALL PART OF THIS PLANET AND ALL THE CREATURES WHO ARE ENTRUSTED TO US. AS WE RECEIVE THE SUNDAY OFFERING EACH WEEK WE SAY “ALL THINGS COME OF THEE O LORD AND OF THINE OWN HAVE WE GIVEN THEE.”

THIS IS NOT A LITTLE, ROTE DITTY. IT’S A STATEMENT OF HOW OUR LIVES ARE ORIENTED – TOWARD GOD. IT IS A RECOGNITION THAT EVERY SINGLE THING WE HAVE COMES FROM GOD. IT IS AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT GOD GIVES AND GIVES AND GIVES TO US. OUR RESPONSE IS THANKFULNESS FOR GOD’S CONTINUAL GIFTS, AND A RETURNING TO GOD A PORTION OF WHAT GOD GIVES TO US.

HOW DO WE LIVE? AS WE PEOPLE WHO LIVE OUT A MODEL OF SCARCITY – “I DON’T HAVE ENOUGH! I NEED TO KEEP IT ALL FOR ME.” OR DO WE LIVE OUT OF A MODEL OF GENEROSITY – SAYING, THANK YOU GOD; I SHARE WITH YOU A PORTION OF ALL THAT YOU HAVE GIVEN ME.”?

AS WE BRING OUR BELOVED PETS TO BE BLESSED TODAY – MAY WE REMEMBER THAT WE ARE TO TAKE THE SAME CARE OF ALL OF GOD’S CREATURES AND ALL OF CREATION. WE ARE TO GIVE THANKS TO GOD AS WE CARE FOR CREATION AND AS WE RETURN TO GOD A PORTION OF WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN US.