

Sermon  
Creation Sunday/Pet Blessing  
October 6, 2013  
William Bradbury

Genesis 9:8-17  
Psalm 148:7-14  
Galatians 6:14-18  
Matthew 11:25-30

Wendell Berry begins his poem "The Peace of Wild Things" by saying,

**When despair grows in me  
and I wake in the middle of the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be...**

From time to time we all know that despair. I feel it when our national government is no longer run by grown-ups.

I feel it on the home front because ever since our move last week I've felt like I'm living in the land of boxes and misplaced stuff.

To be human is to feel like we are going against the grain of the universe, finding once easy things hard and hard things impossible. We know how tiring it can be to live feeling out of sorts with our life.

**But we keep gathering week after week precisely because we know there is a better way, a way of living that is peaceful, hopeful, joyful. We experience it from time to time and we want more of it.**

**We know it's right there in front of us in the reading from Genesis 9 when God says to Noah: "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark."**

From the dawn of time God acts on our behalf by entering into a covenant, an agreement, not just with human beings, but with all creation. God reorders everything so there can once again be peace on earth and peace in our hearts.

God does God's part and the animals and plants do their part, but Noah and his family, and all of us after them fail to do our part. You'll recall shortly after he got off the ark Noah took drunk, got naked, and embarrassed his family. We've been doing similar and even more destructive things ever since!

In the arrogance of the egoic mind we imagine that we are in charge, that we can do whatever we want, this is our world and we don't have to share it with anyone!

We can pollute the rivers and the air, we can undermine the climate and destroy ecosystems because we want to build our national kingdoms.

Mary Oliver at the end of her poem Wild Geese says:

"Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things."

**This is what God offers to us in the covenant with creation—that we might know our place in the family of things.**

There is no harmony in a person's heart or world until we know our place in the universe.

This has taken on new meaning for me since my son's dog Charlie has come to live with us for a year. One of you kindly gave me a book by Caesar Millan who is known as the Dog Whisperer on his TV show on National Geographic that ran for many years. In the book, he tells how to raise a healthy, balanced dog by helping your dog find his place as a member of the pack who follows and not who leads. **Unbalanced dogs are created when their owners do not take leadership, thereby allowing the dog to lead the family, instead of vice versa. The dog finds his place in the family of things following the pack leader's calm assertive energy that sets clear boundaries, gives lots of exercise and direction before showering the dog with affection.**

Throughout history God has sought to lead us back into harmony with Life, through covenants, Laws, Prophets, and sages in all religions.

And in the fullness of time God sends Jesus to reconnect us to God and Life—to liberate us from the prison of the egoic mind and to empower us to find our place in the family of things, freeing us to love God and neighbor.

**So today Jesus says to us:**

**“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.<sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”**

We will only find our place and our peace by being yoked to Christ who can lead and guide us.

But the human ego thinks it can lead itself, so it refuses to be yoked to anything except its desires of the moment. It refuses to understand others because it is too busy judging them. It refuses to share when it can have it all.

It refuses, that is, until finally it has suffered enough and surrenders control to its Lord and Master, to Christ Jesus, the only leader who knows where he is going and is capable of taking us there.

It is a tribute to God's love that no matter how many times we run away Christ keeps coming to find us and to bring us back into God's pack where we belong.

**As Richard Rohr says, "Isn't it wonderful news, brothers and sisters, that we come to God not by our perfection but by our imperfection?"** Daily Meditation October 6, 2013

Christ is the only healer for those who are "**are weary and are carrying heavy burdens**".

As Saint Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century famously said:

"You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."

We bring our pets into church today because they too are included in God's covenant with Noah. They know their place in creation. They know who they are—until we come along and unbalance them by treating them as humans or worse, as objects of our violence, like those two dogs that attacked me in North Carolina ten years ago.

Now they wait, as Saint Paul recognizes, "with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;<sup>20</sup> ... that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; <sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."

In the beginning God assigns us the role of stewards of creation. Until we find our place in Christ we will continue to think the role of steward of creation someone else's job.

**So it is a good thing to have your pets here today. If we can be still enough we will find they have much to teach us about our place in God's world.**

**So let me end with Wendell Berry's poem in its entirety:**

### **The Peace of Wild Things**

When despair grows in me  
and I wake in the middle of the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting for their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.