

Sermon Text for April 19, 2015

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Matthew 6:25-31, Genesis 1:20-25
“All Creatures Great and Small”

You can probably guess where we find ourselves in the creation narrative. That’s right, when God creates animals. Animals are such wonderful creatures. We are able to have a great fellowship with them, but only on their level. We talk to them like we talk to little babies, we don’t ask them about how they are feeling deep down inside.

Scripture says we were created in the image of God, but not animals. They to be cared for, to be helped. They were created so that we could be their masters... Must be nice.

I want you to stop and think about the last time in your life that someone took care of you or cared for you in one way or another. Maybe you had surgery or a baby and somebody brought you food or stopped by to say “hey”. Maybe you were moving and people came by to lend you a hand. Maybe you needed prayer and someone came over to pray for you. Whatever the situation may have been think of a time that you were cared for. It’s a good feeling isn’t it having someone by your side and caring for you.

Today’s Scriptures assure us that no matter where we are or what we are doing God is there by our side caring for us and guiding us. In Genesis God blesses the animals, in the first blessing of all of Scripture, but then we realize how much more he blesses us, his sons and daughters. Matthew also shows us that all the worry that we put into our lives, all the time we waste wondering what is going to happen is ultimately fruitless because God is in control. Jesus tells us that these creatures are wonderfully and carefully made and so we also must be assured that we are made in like fashion. Indeed we see that all creatures great and small are created by God, wonderfully. But Jesus tells us that there is one thing that distinguishes us as human beings from animals. No it is not intelligence, it is not retro or introspection, it is none of that. What separates us from animals, Jesus states simply, is worry.

We worry about our lives and animals don’t. The creatures of God’s creation, I mean look at her, what does she have to worry about? They know that they are cared for and they don’t worry about tomorrow but we as humans do worry. Jesus asks should we not rejoice that we are cared for, that we are loved? All creatures, great and small, are loved by and cared after by God. And we have the advantage of knowing God

personally, so are able to witness that first-hand. Shouldn't this prevent us from worrying. Maybe the tragic truth is that we are unable to turn things over to God because we don't believe that God can take care of all our problems from A to Z. Our Father proved his care for us in his son's sacrificial love for us. Let us read about the creation of these worry-free animals and see if we can't steal a chapter from their book.

I can't think of a time in the modern history of our world that worry has become such a prevalent theme. When I say the word ISIS it is a concern that could hit close to home. The conflicts and wars from Iran, Ukraine, Palestine and who knows, maybe even here on our border, worry is something which marks this generation. If our children learn from us then this will be generation W, where W stands for worry.

One of the terms that psychologists like to use a lot is the term co-dependence. Someone who is co-dependent is not healthy according to psychologists because they are not able to function on their own and can only see themselves through the eyes of the person upon whom they are dependent. This has given the term dependency a negative connotation. My own theory is that being dependent is a viable and normal way of life. From the time we are born we are dependent. First we depend on our parents. Then we depend on our spouses. Then we depend on our kids. This dependency follows us throughout life. In fact I would argue that since the beginning creation itself has been a completely co-dependent creature. Maybe dependency is not a bad thing after all but rather a good thing because it reminds us that we need others and they need us. Dependency allows us to know that we are loved, cared for, and ultimately have value because God has called us his children.

Yesterday we had a marathon day as parents. We were at Red Lion for two of Bethany's basketball games, then to Shippensburg for Naomi's track meet, and then to Carlisle to see Rachel play against Dickinson. In each of those events it was all about teamwork. Any team event is really all about dependency and team work and being able to rely completely upon a certain person on your team performing a certain task. Animals were created to be a part of our team. They remind us of God's provisions in so many different ways.

Genesis is an account of the truth that all of creation is completely dependent upon God. Genesis allows us to understand God's ultimate love and care for us through his creative acts in the world. This is supposed to create within us a desire to be wholly dependent upon God. It is a good thing to be completely dependent upon God. What

Genesis eventually teaches us is that God can only care for us as God would want to care for us if we depend upon God. When we stop thinking that we are dependent upon anyone, especially God, then we lose that relationship, we lose that bond that we have with God. It is when we try to become independent that we run into trouble. That isn't what we are taught in the world, is it? Be yourself, who cares about other people. That's not the message of Genesis.

We love our Rosie, kind of the perfect dog. We had a bit of a scare the other day... Really, almost a perfect dog. But we had one dog in Florida which was its exact opposite. Brandy. It seemed to know whenever we left something outside by mistake because in the morning she would present it to you in its new and improved mangled form. This dog knew the difference between weeds and just planted, watered and fertilized hibiscus and seemed to prefer the later. And yet regardless of how bad our pets act we nevertheless say, well she's just a dog and doesn't know any better and we continue to feed them and give them water. It is not as if when she eats up your hose for the third time you stop feeding her, although you might want to try that you just don't do that. Pets ultimately seem to go through life quite placidly and carefree.

In fact in Genesis we find that God not only states that these animals are good but we also find the very first blessing in all of Scripture given to the animals. If I were to say "and God blessed them saying "be fruitful and multiply" who would you think that I was talking about? Wouldn't you think that I was talking about Adam, about humanity? God first gives this blessing to the animals. If I were to say and God looked to find a proper helper for man. Who do you think I'm talking about in regards to who does God create? Genesis 2, it's animals, and it wasn't exactly what Adam had in mind. It is obvious that God loves the animals which is seen not only in his creation of them but also in his blessing of them. There is a clear theology of blessing here that starts with the animals.

We find in Genesis that God cared for the animals and the animals were dependent upon God for all things. Do you know that we share day 6 with the animals, another hint that not only do we depend upon God but all creatures, great and small, rely on God and each other as well.

In Matthew Jesus uses this example of the birds and the flowers of the field to not only show God's care and love for us but also to make sure that we know that if we are dependent upon God just as the animals are then we will not need to worry about our life,

just as the animals don't worry about their lives. Jesus is telling us point blank here if the animals can trust in God, then so can you. The key to the Genesis and the Matthew Scriptures is God's providential care for us which should convince us to be completely dependent upon God. God's love and care for us is so dramatic, it is so real that he wonderfully knit us in our mother's womb and we really have no choice but to believe that we will be taken of. Philippians 4:6 states it this way: Have no anxieties about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known before God.

This is what we get in Matthew: Jesus telling his disciples, don't worry, we'll make it, after all look at God's creatures, they make it. These disciples to whom Jesus is talking had all left their livelihood, they had all left their bread and butter jobs for the reason of following Jesus. Jesus reminds them that God blesses the animals. Just think of how much more he will bless you.

Do we believe ultimately in God's care for us? Now I don't mean does God care about us. Of course we can all agree on that. No I am asking do we believe that God cares and provides for us just as or even more than he does the animals we read about in creation? I know many of you are going through a period in your life that is transitional and fragmented. Many of you are wondering what comes next in this stage in your life, God will care for you. Your company has been talking that layoffs might be at hand, or you don't feel called to doing what you are currently doing, worrying will not add a single day to your stay here on this earth. You are facing health issues which incredibly uncertain. In these real life issues, can we say: don't worry, God is in control.

It is in the midst of these life and death issues where we need to see God coming to us as he did on the day of creation and say: where are you, I have created you, I have plans for you. Do not worry. If we are not able to see and feel God's hand in our transitions and in our life changes then we will be very much alone. If we are not able to be completely dependent upon God then we will not be able to receive God's care and unconditional love as we should.

Some scholars say these Scriptures in Genesis were actually put in writing during a time when the Israelites were in exile, slaves under the Babylonians and they needed to hear about God's providential care for them in a time in their lives when things were a mess and there was plenty to worry about. The theology of blessing in these verses extends to all creatures great and small. It helped the Israelites cope and keep sane. My

thought is that we could use these verses in a similar time in history to cope and keep sane.

We all worry about so many things. This is a clear sign that in those moments our eyes are on ourselves and not on God. If we can trust Him we can eliminate worry. Let us remind ourselves of the creation account. Let us remember God's blessing upon us as seen in Jesus Christ. And let us trust in Him. I would encourage you today to let Him care for you Amen.