

October 6, 2024  
Lectionary 27, Year B  
The 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Genesis 2:18-24  
Psalm 8  
Mark 10:2-16  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA  
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

### Earth Creatures

I have a lot of Facebook friends who don't like people. Now, I don't become anyone's friend on Facebook unless I have a real-life relationship with them, outside of Facebook, which means that, I have a lot of actual, real-life friends who don't like people. At least, based on what they say on Facebook, they don't like people very much. Instead, they like animals. So, they post memes like this on their Facebook pages:

First instinct when I see an animal is to say "hello".

First instinct when I see a person is to avoid eye contact and hope it goes away.

I respect animals more than I do people—we're the ones messing up this world, not them.

Dogs are furry children that will never ask for money, a car, or a phone. And they are always glad to see you.

I'm suspicious of people who don't like dogs...but I totally trust a dog when it doesn't like a person.

Why cats? Because cats are better than people. That's why!

Finally:

I just like animals more than I like people. It's that simple.

First take away from all of this is that it's amazing that I'm able to be real-life and Facebook friends with these folks, since I am, in fact, a person and not an animal. Maybe I get a pass because I, too, love animals. I don't love animals more than I love people, but I do love animals. I love my pets and I love other animals too.

Second take away is that I wonder if those animal loving and people disliking Facebook and actual friends of mine think that Adam got it wrong.

In the story of creation from the second chapter of Genesis, part of which is our first reading for today, a companion is being sought for Adam, the creature that God created from the dust of the earth and from God's own breath. The Hebrew word for the dust from which Adam is created is "Adamah", so Adam, is the earth creature, the Adam who comes from the earth, the Adamah. We see the same connection in English between the words "humus" (not hummus, that's a dip made of chick peas and garlic), but humus, which means, the organic part of soil, the part of the soil that comes from life and gives life, and "human", as in human being, earth creature from the earth, dust creature from the dust. The word humus is also related to the word humble. As in, "O human beings, remember where you come from."

So, there was this earth creature, this Adam, and in God's judgment, God, whose very nature as the triune God is relational, is community, it was not good for the earth creature to be alone. So, for the companionship of the earth creature, so that the earth creature would have a companion and helper, God created more creatures of the earth, animals and birds, and presented them to the Adam, to name them and to see which one would be claimed as a companion.

The Adam gave names to the animals and birds, but claimed none of them as a companion or a partner.

And right there is where the story falls apart for my animal loving people disliking friends. Why, they might wonder, could Adam not just have gone for a dog, or perhaps a cat, maybe a horse, as his companion, partner, helper?

Instead, the whole story of the woman being created happens. The Hebrew word for man is “ish”. What is created from the substance of the man is the “ishah” who, in chapter three of Genesis, is called Eve, which is an English version of the Hebrew word, “Chavah”, which is the feminine version of the Hebrew word for “life”.

It is God’s intention in the partnership and companionship of the two earth creatures that have been created, the ish and ishah, the man and the woman, Adam and Eve, that life would flow, and that that life would be poured out on all of creation, on the animals of the land, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and the children who would come of the life-giving embrace of Adam and Eve.

In today’s Psalm we hear more about the lofty hopes and expectations for the partnership and companions of the earth creatures, the man and the woman.

The Psalm includes in verse 4 an acknowledgment of humility, “what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them, human beings that you should care for them...” (Psalm 8:4) Humble humus.

But then it goes one to say, to celebrate, to rejoice and wonder in the work that God has given human beings to do,

Yet you have made them little less than divine;  
with glory and honor you crown them.  
You have made them rule over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet:

all flocks and cattle,  
even the wild beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, the fish of the sea,  
and whatever passes along the paths of the sea.  
O Lord our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8:5-9)

The Psalm talks about dominion, the lordship that the man and the woman are supposed to have over all living creatures. And we all know how that has turned out.

God drew the human beings out of the earth, our very names say that it is so, for partnership, for companionship, and for life, and placed them in a garden, giving it to them to tend, to care for, to be life givers themselves, but throughout history, human beings have destroyed the gardens that we were supposed to care for, ravaged them, plundered them, and exploited rather than caring for the other creatures that share the creation with us, the beasts, the birds, the fish, the insects. The dominion we were supposed to exercise is intended to look like the life-giving Lordship of God, but that's not the way that it's turned out. Collectively, we have forgotten our relationship with the very earth from which we were called and our companionship with each other and with the other creatures of the earth.

And then, of course, there are human relationships that have not gone so well.

The words of Jesus found in our gospel reading for today could be seen as very challenging. They might seem to our modern ears to be a hard teaching on divorce. A teaching that might be and has been used to trap people, women and men in harmful and life destroying relationships.

Jesus was asked “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” and Jesus’ answer, was this:

But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’  
‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”  
(Mark 10:6-9)

Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. (Mark 10:11-12)

For many people who have found life and freedom in divorce and love and companionship and partnership in a new marriage, these words might appear to condemn their new life.

But in their historical context, I believe that Jesus intended them to be life giving. In Jesus’ time a man could divorce his wife for any reason. It was very difficult and very rare for a woman to divorce her husband. If a man divorced his wife, for whatever trivial reason that he chose, she was left destitute. Impoverished, disgraced, and, unless her family of origin would take her back in her disgraced condition, she was often left to begging or even driven to prostitution in order to support herself. So, these words of Jesus, which are often seen as words intended to entrap are actually words intended to protect.

In the same way, Jesus’ welcoming of the little children into his presence, which is a much less troubling story, a story that it is much easier for us to embrace, tells us that something was wrong in the ways that human beings were interacting with each other. It begs the question of why people were trying to stop children

from coming into the presence of Jesus. It seems like the old maxim that children should be seen and not heard taken to an extreme.

But it is true that throughout history and even in our time children, some of the most vulnerable in society, have not been seen as welcome, have not been treasured and celebrated, have not been valued and protected. By embracing children and making them as the models of faithfulness, Jesus was once again speaking words of protection for the vulnerable and lifting up the lowly.

But perhaps the fact that Jesus needed to speak these words of protection for women and children, some of the most vulnerable in the society in which he lived, and even, in some places, still are vulnerable in our time, the fact that Jesus needed to tell us not to abandon our loved ones and to treasure not just our own children, but all children, perhaps the fact that our God given dominion of the earth has resulted in our ravaging the earth and the creatures that share this planet with us, are reasons that so many of my Facebook and actual friends like animals better than people. They have given up on humanity.

But God has not. God has not given up on humanity. In spite of our individual and communal failings and failures to be all that God has created and called us to be, God has not abandoned us and God's love for us is everlasting. And still God calls, and still God does God's creative work in us, and still God invites us into community with him and with each other and with the whole creation.

And, flawed creatures of the earth that we are, we are still called to be models of God's Lordship in the world and, as God once breathed life into us and created us in his image, we are called and empowered by God, to be a part of God's ongoing creative work, bringing life to the world. Amen.