

Hearsall at Home for 9th October 2022

Best Friends?

Welcome

Hello and welcome to Hearsall at home for 9th October 2022. Last Tuesday was World Animal Day, a moment to focus on animal welfare across the world and to celebrate the life of all creatures on this planet. In the in-person service at Hearsall this week, folks are invited to bring a dog to church. You'll find these themes reflected in our service here.

Call to Worship

Some words from a Psalm draw us into our theme:

- 7 Praise the Lord from the earth,
 you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
8 lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
 stormy winds that do his bidding,
9 you mountains and all hills,
 fruit trees and all cedars,
10 wild animals and all cattle,
 small creatures and flying birds,
11 kings of the earth and all nations,
 you princes and all rulers on earth,
12 young men and women,
 old men and children.
- 13 Let them praise the name of the Lord,
 for his name alone is exalted;
 his splendour is above the earth and the heavens.

Psalm 148: 7 - 13

We sing the hymn, *All Things Bright and Beautiful*.

Hymn (BPW 116) **All Things Bright and Beautiful**

Refrain:

*All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
And All things wise and wonderful:
The Lord God made them all.*

Each little flower that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colours,
He made their tiny wings.

Refrain

The purple-headed mountains,
The river running by,
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky.

Refrain

The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
He made them every one.

Refrain

He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well.

Refrain

Canticle of the Creatures (St Francis of Assisi)

Most high, all powerful, all good Lord!

All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour, and all blessing.

To You, alone, Most High, do they belong. No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all Your creatures, especially through my Lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and You give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour! Of You, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars; in the heavens You have made them bright, precious and beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and clouds and storms, and all the weather, through which You give Your creatures sustenance.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water; she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You brighten the night. He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth, who feeds us and rules us, and produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of You; through those who endure sickness and trial. Happy those who endure in peace, for by You, Most High, they will be crowned.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Bodily Death, from whose embrace no living person can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Happy those she finds doing Your most holy will. The second death can do no harm to them.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks, and serve Him with great humility. Amen

Our prayers of concern for the world today are written and read by Val Taylor...

Prayers

Dear God... Our prayers today are for the creatures of this world; the ones who fly, who walk, who swim, who crawl, who hop, even who slither... We do this, God, because they have no voice and they have no choice. Please help us to realise and accept that they have as much right to live on this wonderful planet as we do. Help us to show them love and respect, and to treat them with dignity and kindness.

We pray for the dedicated people who devote their lives to helping the animal world; for vets and nurses, charity organisations, gamekeepers, zoologists, and every rescue centre. We pray for all working animals: horses, monkeys, elephants and a little Jack Russell in Ukraine, called Patron, who so far has sniffed out 90 Russian bombs. Go Patron! We pray for his safety.

We pray for all dogs who help us: in the police or the military, and dogs who help adults with anxiety or dogs who can identify certain cancers, epileptic fits and diabetic emergencies; for dogs who patrol airports sniffing for drugs but also the ones who calm nervous flyers... Dogs who help blind people and hearing-impaired people.... Dogs used in dental surgeries... Dogs who live in elderly care homes, hospices, cancer wards... The list is endless.

Dear God, your love lives in their very breath. We ask you to bless them all, for they have no voice and they have no choice.

And, please God, I know I ask you this every day, but please can we keep David Attenborough a little while longer... Thank you and Amen.

Thanks, Val, for those creative and thought-provoking prayers. We sing the song, *If I were a butterfly...*

Song (WT 203) **If I were a Butterfly**

If I were a butterfly, I'd thank you, Lord, for giving me wings.

And if I were a robin in a tree, I'd thank you, Lord, that I could sing.

And if I were a fish in the sea, I'd wiggle my tail and I'd giggle with glee,

But I just thank you, Father, for making me, me.

Refrain

*For you gave me a heart and you gave me a smile,
You gave me Jesus and you made me your child,
And I just thank you, Father, for making me, me.*

If I were an elephant,
I'd thank you, Lord, by raising my trunk.
And if I were a kangaroo,
You know I'd hop right up to you.
And if I were an octopus,
I'd thank you, Lord, for my fine looks,
But I just thank you, Father, for making me, me.

Refrain

If I were a wiggly worm,
I'd thank You, Lord, that I could squirm.
And if I were a billy goat,
I'd thank You, Lord, for my strong throat.
And if I were a fuzzy-wuzzy bear,
I'd thank You, Lord, for my fuzzy-wuzzy hair,
But I just thank You, Father,
For making me 'me.'

Refrain

World Animal Day

This year, World Animal Day took place on Tuesday 4th October. It goes back to a Polish man called Heinrich Zimmermann, an animal welfare activist in Berlin. Although originally celebrated in March for practical reasons, within a few years the date of 4th October was adopted, as it is the feast day of Saint Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology and animals. The mission of World Animal Day is to raise the status of animals and to improve animal welfare standards all around the world.

It's well-known that bees are vital pollinators in our food chain, but we increasingly realise that humanity is intrinsically linked with all life on this planet. Today, we remember this truth.

The World Animal Day website includes information about the lemurs of Madagascar, where deforestation has affected their numbers so seriously that there are now more lemurs in captivity around the world than living in their natural habitat.

Lemurs are said to have travelled to Madagascar centuries ago, clinging to bits of floating trees and other vegetation. Now, many of their 111 species are endangered or critically endangered.

The ring-tailed lemur is probably the most well-known of the lemur family, with its black and white striped long tail, actually longer than its body at around 22 inches, and black masked face.

Madagascar has lost around 80 percent of its forests due to the extraction of hardwoods such as mahogany and tamarind trees. The land has been cleared for agriculture and grazing using 'slash and burn' techniques, logging for precious woods to use for construction, fuel and charcoal. Other deforested areas are replaced with coffee and vanilla trees.

What's wrong with coffee and vanilla trees you might think? Well, coffee and vanilla simply aren't on a lemur's menu or shopping list. They depend on the forest for eating fruit, flowers, leaves, bark and sap. They also like to snack on rotten wood, earth, insects and small vertebrates.

The Madagascan people have made efforts to help them regain their habitat by creating corridors of lemur-friendly forest, but conservation projects need to gain momentum if they are to make a real difference to the lemurs' future survival.

Conservation of the remaining natural habitat, including the mountain forest, is urgently needed. Community-based conservation needs to be increased and the illegal trade of lemurs is also threatening the survival of this incredible creature. Once captured, they are often kept in small cages or other unsuitable conditions.

Ring-tailed lemurs are very cheeky, sociable and affectionate, always playing, chasing and snuggling while groups of them like to sleep in a big ball to keep each other warm. They like to sunbathe together in a yoga pose and seem to go off into a trance.

But human activity puts the survival of these amazing and delightful creatures at risk. We can help by supporting conservation projects such as those run by Twycross Zoo or the Cotswold Wildlife Park.

So, do lemurs matter to God? Let's hear a couple of Bible readings and reflect on them together.

Bible Readings

Genesis 7: 1 – 5

7 The LORD then said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. **2** Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, **3** and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. **4** Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.'

5 And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him.

1 Corinthians 13: 1 - 3

13 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. **3** If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. **5** It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no

record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Talk

Best Friends?

Introduction

The old saying has it that dogs are man's best friend... what of our connection with not just canines but all creatures on this planet? Can we be friends with them, too?

Animals get some pretty important roles in the Bible. Ravens, doves, whales, sheep, lions, sparrows and donkeys all play their part. And of course, we have all those animals invited onto Noah's famous ark.

Noah's story is set in a time of great human wickedness. As God intervenes, many humans must perish, but representatives of all the animals are saved. It seems that the animals matter. Why?

1 Animals sometimes help us

1 Kings 17 tells a story about a prophet being helped by birds. It was the time of wicked King Ahab. This monarch was bad news and had committed sin after sin. In turn, he was leading most of his people into wicked ways as well. So God punished the whole nation by sending a drought.

But God had not forgotten his people and he sent the famous prophet Elijah to guide

them back to good ways of living. The trouble was, Elijah himself needed to survive the drought and the famine as he prepared in the wilderness to bring God's message.

So, the text tells us that God commanded the ravens to bring him meat and bread every morning and every evening. That kept him going. Animals do indeed sometimes help us, and Elijah gets through a tough spot to be ready to challenge the power of the king...

Of course, some wild animals remain dangerous to us, but we humans need to learn to understand them, and in turn, they too may help us. We think of the story of St. Francis and the Wolf... In this well-known legend, Francis goes to the Italian town of Gubbio, where a fierce wolf had been attacking people in the village.

Francis goes out to meet the wolf. When the wolf sees Francis, he comes charging at the saint with his mouth open, ready to attack.

Francis immediately makes the sign of the cross over him and says, "Come here, Brother Wolf. I command you on behalf of Christ that you do no harm to me or to anyone." As soon as St. Francis does this, the wolf closes his mouth and stops running; and comes meekly as a lamb and throws itself at the feet of St. Francis.

Then St. Francis tells Brother Wolf off for attacking people. "I want to make peace between you and the people. And so I promise that I will have food given to you regularly, Brother Wolf, by the people of this town so that you will no longer suffer hunger. And I want you, Brother Wolf, to promise that you will never harm any human person or animal." The wolf bows his head in agreement.

And so Francis asks the people of the town if they will promise to provide food for the wolf regularly. They all say they will. Finally, St. Francis asks the wolf to give a guarantee in front of all of the people that he will no longer inflict harm upon the people of Gubbio or its animals.

Then the wolf, lifting his right paw, places it in the hand of St. Francis. Because of this action...there is rejoicing and wonder among all the people. Afterwards the wolf lived in Gubbio for two years, and he entered the houses, going from door to door,

without hurting anyone and was kindly fed by the people.... Finally, after two years, Brother Wolf died of old age, at which the citizens grieved very much.”

Perhaps the wolf of Gubbio helps us because the story reminds us that when another person is being angry or difficult or dangerous, we may need to understand them if we have any chance of helping them. Through understanding and forgiveness, enemies can become friends.

But sometimes animals help us apparently out of sheer altruism. There are many stories of animals rescuing people in danger. To give just one example, the Daily Record told how a friendly dolphin saved a teenage boy from drowning in August 2000. Non-swimmer Davide Ceci, 14, was in serious trouble in the sea when a well-known local dolphin Filippo came to his rescue. The friendly 61-stone creature had been a popular tourist attraction off Manfredonia in south-east Italy for two years. But then he became a local hero after saving Davide from the Adriatic when he fell from his father’s boat.

While Emanuele Ceci was still unaware his son had fallen into the waves, Filippo was pushing him up out of the water to safety. Davide said: “When I realised it was Filippo pushing me, I grabbed on to him.” The dolphin bore down on the boat and got close enough for Davide’s father to grab his gasping son.

Filippo lived in the waters off Manfredonia for many years. Maritime researcher Dr Giovanna Barbieri said: “Filippo seems not to have the slightest fear of humans. I’m not surprised he should have done such a wonderful thing as to save a human.”

Many animals help us in so many ways. Children may read to a dog at Earlsdon library - the dog doesn’t criticise their abilities. The internet is awash with stories of animals helping people: of gorillas protecting toddler humans, of seals and whales rescuing drowning people, of bears saving people from mountain lions and more... We certainly know, as Val mentioned in her prayers, that animals help humans in countless different ways. Animals matter.

2 Animals bring great hidden value to humanity

There’s a lovely old story in Numbers 22. Some people are trying to buy Baalam’s

services as a prophet, and have him curse an enemy people. They pressurise Balaam and persuade him to go with them. He saddles his donkey and sets off.

But this donkey behaves rather oddly. At one point it wanders off the road and heads into a field, much to Balaam's irritation. He beats his donkey and sets it on the road again.

Next the donkey comes to a narrow path through some vineyards, with a wall either side. The donkey stops again, and this time crushes Balaam's foot against the wall. Again, Balaam is cross, and he beats his donkey with his staff.

A third time the donkey refuses to go on: this time they have come to a narrow gap between rocks and there is no space to turn, so the donkey just lies on the floor with Balaam still on it. Balaam is angry and beats his donkey with a staff once more.

Then the Lord helped the donkey to talk! It said, "What have I done to make you beat me three times?"

Balaam says the donkey has made a fool of him. If he had a sword in his hand, he'd kill it right now!

But the donkey asks a question: 'Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?'

Balaam has to admit the donkey has a point! But then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw an angel standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hands. It seems the angel would have killed Balaam if he had proceeded. Each time, the donkey had been protecting his master from the threat of the angel.

Whatever we make of that story, we are reminded that animals can have a sixth sense. They may be able to pick up danger signals before we can. Animals may well have a value beyond anything of which we are aware.

Scientists talk about biodiversity. Pollinators including birds, bees and other insects are estimated to allow about a third of the world's crops to grow. Bacteria are vital to

the health of our guts. Worms improve soil quality; world agriculture depends on invertebrates and microbes.

Wetland areas, plants, trees and grasslands help the planet deal with flooding. Vegetation gives us clean air and absorbs CO₂. Coral reefs and mangrove forests protect land from storms; rainforests act like lungs for the planet.

Medicines and other useful chemical compounds originate from plants across the planet. And we know that mental health is improved by gardening and that people feel so much better for being in green spaces.

People can't really be extracted from the web of life on Earth. In reality, we depend on the rich variety of species on our planet. Animals bring great hidden value to humanity, and this is another reason why they matter.

3) Animals are intrinsically valuable in their own right

In Luke chapter 12, Jesus is discussing God's care for people, but he compares it with God's care for animals. *Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Jesus asks. Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.* Jesus is saying that small life forms are still valuable to God even if humans value them cheaply.

In Romans chapter 8, the apostle Paul speaks of the whole creation waiting in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. In his theology, we are not alone, but belong to the web of all life, and that life is being gathered together in God. As Pope Francis has said: *All creation has an intrinsic value that is independent of its usefulness.*

We now know that on planet earth, even where there are no humans, life thrives. Under shelves of ice, deep in ocean trenches, in the craters of volcanoes, life finds a way. So animals are not valuable only because they may help people or bring us value. They are precious in their own right.

Christian theology includes the idea of people having dominion over all creation. But dominion is not the same as domination. If all life is precious to God, then it follows

that we should never mistreat animals and that animal cruelty is an offence against God.

So, earlier I was mentioning the 110 species of lemur living on Madagascar... I guess that human life could continue were there no lemurs on this planet. But does that mean we should be indifferent to their plight and continue to destroy their habitat?

No! Lemurs matter to God and their existence on the planet is not simply a matter of their direct utilitarian value to people. They are beautiful, funny, sociable creatures and their existence is a delight to their Creator.

Conclusion

In his introduction to his Epitaph to his beloved dog Boatswain, Byron wrote these telling words:

*Near this Spot
are deposited the Remains of one who possessed
Beauty without Vanity,
Strength without Insolence,
Courage without Ferocity,
and all the virtues of Man without his Vices.
This praise, which would be unmeaning Flattery
if inscribed over human Ashes,
is but a just tribute to the Memory of
BOATSWAIN, a DOG,
who was born in Newfoundland May 1803
and died at Newstead Nov. 18th, 1808.*

Byron goes on in the poem to question human notions of superiority and of a heaven that is exclusively theirs. He implies that, if anyone is 'going to heaven' a loyal dog is a more worthy candidate than a vile human.

Our thoughts today certainly make it very difficult to imagine a heaven with only people. On earth, at least, we cannot live independently of plants and animals.

Paul's famous poem to love declares that love is patient and kind. It is not boastful, dishonest or self-seeking. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

It's love that endures. So much of human culture is mere noise: like a clanging cymbal! Even an ability to move mountains will be regarded as nothing. The only thing that matters, the only thing that survives, the thing that becomes clear, is love.

And I guess that many of us here today would acknowledge that love, expressed as patience, kindness, generosity of spirit and even selflessness, may sometimes be seen in the animal kingdom in a purer and more honest way than it is in the human world.

So, are we friends with life on earth? In a strange way our connection is deeper than friendship. Our very existence depends on the great dance of teeming life of which we are only a part.

We sing the hymn, *Morning has broken...*

Hymn (BPW 132; WT 297) **Morning has Broken**

Morning has broken like the first morning;
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!
Praise for them springing fresh from the Word!

Sweet the rain's new fall sunlit from heaven;
Like the first dew fall on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden;
Sprung in completeness where His feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning!
Born of the one light Eden saw play!
Praise with elation, praise every morning;
God's recreation of the new day!

Morning has broken like the first morning;
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!
Praise for them springing fresh from the Word!

The Starfish (From *the Beasts Choir* by Bernos de Gasztold,
translated by Rumer Godden)

Lord,
your deep has closed over me.
Am I some small Lucifer fallen from heaven
and left to be tormented by the waves?
Look, Lord,
I seem a star of blood.
I try to remember my lost loyalty
but in vain.
Creeping over the sand,
I spread my star-points wide
and dream, dream, dream...
Lord, an angel could root me up
from the bottom of the sea
and set me back in your sky.
Oh! One day could that be?

Prayer of Confession

Lord, we acknowledge humanity's ubiquitous indifference to the animal kingdom. In so many ways, we have seen other living creatures as simply things we may plunder to benefit ourselves. We have destroyed so many habitats. It's true to say that typically, we could hardly have cared less about the suffering of the vast majority of animals, even while we adopt a few as our pets.

And Lord, we acknowledge humanity's arrogant assumption that we are independent of the created order. We have introduced dangerous chemicals, atmospheric pollutants and life-destroying plastics into the web of life on earth. We have

unbalanced our climate. We see marine life ingesting plastic. We see bees threatened by pesticides. We see microplastics and “forever chemicals” even in our own bodies, threatening our health and compromising our reproductive capacity. We lament the folly which is so often attendant on human progress. We have abused our calling to be stewards of your creation and instead become uncaring, arrogant rulers plundering the planet for our convenience.

For these and all our sins, we seek your forgiveness.

Grant us the wisdom, grace and faith we need to learn from the created world, to live in harmony with other species, and to interact with nature in a sustainable, peaceful and caring manner.

We bring these prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Our closing song reflects many of our themes today... *Creation sings the Father's Song.*

Song Creation Sings the Father's Song

Verse 1

Creation sings the Father's song;
He calls the sun to wake the dawn
And run the course of day
Till evening falls in crimson rays,
His fingerprints in flakes of snow,
His breath upon this spinning globe.
He charts the eagle's flight,
Commands the new-born baby's cry.

Chorus

Hallelujah!

Let all creation stand and sing,

Hallelujah!

Fill the earth with songs of worship;

Tell the wonders of creation's King.

Verse 2

Creation gazed upon His face,
The ageless One in time's embrace,
Unveiled the Father's plan
Of reconciling God and man.
A second Adam walked the earth,
Whose blameless life would break the curse,
Whose death would set us free
To live with Him eternally.

Chorus

Hallelujah!

Let all creation stand and sing,

Hallelujah!

Fill the earth with songs of worship;

Tell the wonders of creation's King.

Verse 3

Creation longs for His return
When Christ shall reign upon the earth.
The bitter wars that rage
Are birth pains of a coming age.
When He renews the land and sky,
All heaven will sing and earth reply
With one resplendent theme:
The glory of our God and King!

Chorus x 2

Ending

Fill the earth with songs of worship;

Tell the wonders of creation's King.

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;

And the love of God;

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Be with us all, evermore.

Amen

Sung Blessing

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you

Wherever he may send you;

May he guide you through the wilderness;

Protect you through the storm;

May he bring you home rejoicing

At the wonders he has shown you;

May he bring you home rejoicing

Once again into our doors.