

## **2022 TALK FOR CAREY, 3.7.22, BIRDS & BEASTIES OF THE BIBLE (1)**

### **(GENESIS 1:20-31, MATT 6:25-34) CARING FOR GOD'S GOOD CREATION**

What do you think? Do you think this is true? That all human beings have an in-built love for nature? That we all wonder at God's creation...? What do you think? Hands up if you think this is true... You might even feel that this is obvious, self-evident. But if this is true, it inevitably raises further, searching questions for us. If we love God's creation, why do we human beings seem to treat it so badly...? I guess the rest of the opening of the book of Genesis gives us important clues about the answer to that question.

We marvel at nature. But it's probably also true that us human beings have something of a fear of nature. The fear of wolves, snakes and other wild animals is something which runs deep in our psyche. We have a deep-seated respect for the sometimes unpredictable power of the natural world. We recognise that, despite God's command to Adam and Eve to 'rule over' this world, nature doesn't always comply and behave as we would like it to.

So, it's fair to say that we all have a slightly ambiguous relationship with the rest of God's creation. Our mysterious environment often mystifies us. And we can live for many years with a particular pet, for example, without completely understanding why they behave the way they sometimes do. (Some nodding?)

Each of us was conceived inside a self-contained world. But even within the womb, we have an in-built awareness of the world outside. A data-bank within our DNA which holds both a knowledge of and a readiness to learn from God's creation. So, what I **was** going to say to start this talk is not true. I was going to say that I can trace my love for nature back to walks in the wilds with my parents. I can trace it back to many (frustrating) hours on banks of rivers and canals and lakes, trying to catch very elusive fish. Not true. That God-given fascination with the rest of God's creation was there before I was born.

But it is probably true to say that it was during childhood that I developed a particular fascination with anything with wings. I was envious of anything which had the power of flight. Birds, butterflies, bats – you name it. That well-known Psalm of David has it right: 'O that I had the wings of a dove. I could fly away and be at rest'. And my love for butterflies was later confirmed in a number of ways, including an obsession I developed for the Russian novelist, Vladimir Nabokov. Himself an obsessive pursuer of butterflies.

Just the other day, I captured this photo of a butterfly in the woods near Potten End. (PHOTO 1) One of the first butterflies I learned to identify, because it has such striking markings. Anyone tell me the name of this butterfly? (Unfortunately it is sitting on a Himalayan Balsam plant, which is an invasive species. Very fast growing and very difficult to get rid of. But the Balsam is just being obedient to God, because it is intent on multiplying...)

Which brings us back to Genesis 1. Some environmentalists trace the problems of our environment back to this very passage. They blame scripture for the way we seem intent on destroying the habitats of so many creatures and ultimately our own home, planet earth. They say that God's command to Adam and Eve to 'rule over and subdue the rest of creation' is a cause of all our current environmental problems.

But there is a simple answer to this argument. God's command to us to rule over creation does not give us carte-blanc. In fact, God's call is for us to rule as God would rule. In effect, to rule in God's place. To partner with God in caring for our world in the same way God cares for all creation. We are called to care for this planet, in effect, as God would care for it. To use our creativity to ensure that all creation is blessed.

Of course, if you see God as some uncaring tyrant, then this allows humanity free rein to do anything. But this is not the God of the Old & New Testaments. The God who created this world in love, cares so much that he gave his Son to save the world. And what's more, God – from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, calls us to play our part in the salvation of this planet. Just as God's work of creation does not finish in Genesis chapter 2, so God's work of salvation does not finish at John chapter 22. And the works of creation and salvation are the two hands of God. They cannot be separated, any more than we human beings can be separated from God's creation.

So, this is our calling – to care for all God's creation by embodying the good news of God's love for all creation in Christ. Caring for creation means being careful to reduce any harmful effects we might be having on this planet. This includes actively finding ways to reduce our carbon footprint and other pollution. It also includes doing what we can to protect the birds and beasties and other creatures around us.

No doubt you are aware that we not only face a big crisis of climate chaos at present. We also are facing a massive biodiversity crisis. Many species in our world are under great threat, along with the species 'homo sapiens'.

Unfortunately, we are not living up to our name. More like 'homo stupido'...

It's not all bad news. It was good to see in the news recently, the relative success of the cause to save the mountain gorillas of Uganda. A cause much helped by David Attenborough. However, there are many, many more species under similar threat of extinction. To bring things closer to home: (PHOTO 2)

Any ideas what you are looking at here? Not at all clear. But this is a freshwater crayfish in the River Gade, upstream of the park. A photo I took fairly recently. However, this is the American crayfish, an invasive species. It's partly because of the introduction of this species that the native Freshwater Crayfish is endangered. In fact, I was told by someone from Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust that this species is now extinct in Hertfordshire. I'm not 100% convinced of that, as I'm sure I saw two native Crayfish at this same spot in the Gade just last year. But that's another story. Fact is, many birds and beasts are under serious threat of extinction. Too many species.

There is much more we could say about this. But I'm going to save this for the next three Sundays, when we will look at some specific 'Birds & Beasts of the Bible'. Now some of you here may be thinking that preaching on this subject is not preaching the gospel of Jesus. That it is a distraction from the 'real' mission of the church of Christ, who came to save just people.

However, to my mind, it is western theology's obsession with the 'salvation of human souls' which dishonours Jesus and diminishes his mission to our planet. In Jesus' first gospel teachings from the Sermon on the Mount, here in Matthew 6, we see something remarkable. Jesus tells his followers to pay close attention to birds and flowers, for example. You might have thought that Jesus was surely too busy with his mission to save humanity, to spend much time observing the natural world. But no. Here, and elsewhere Jesus draws vital spiritual lessons from the animal and plant kingdoms. Yes, we learn about God's Kingdom from Jesus, the Son of God. But as Jesus himself insists, we can all learn an awful lot about God and God's Kingdom from God's creation.

The prophet Isaiah suggests that the rest of creation is often ahead of us in truly praising and worshipping God. Isaiah 43 mentions jackals and owls

honouring God, whereas God's chosen people are not really honouring God.  
all have much to learn – from Jesus, from each other and from the rest of  
creation. Praise the LORD for the goodness of all creation ! Amen