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INTRODUCTION AND SCRIPTURE IMAGES

The animals of God's creation inhabit the skies, the earth, and the sea. They share in the fortunes of human existence and have a part in human life. God, who confers gifts on all living things, has often used the service of animals or made them the reminders of the gifts of salvation.

Animals were saved from the flood and afterwards made a part of the covenant with Noah.

The paschal lamb recalls the Passover sacrifice and the deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

A giant fish saved Jonah.

Ravens brought bread to Elijah.

Animals were included in the repentance of Nineveh.

And animals share in Christ's redemption of all God's creation.

Therefore, we invoke God's blessings on all animals, and especially these animals gathered here. May our blessing of these animals be a means of lifting our praise to God the Creator and to thank God for setting us as stewards over all the creatures of the earth.

SCRIPTURE

Today, be reminded that God created all animals and declared it good. To humans, God gave responsibility—stewardship—over all creatures. From the creation story in Genesis 1:

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Gen 1:24-26, 31a NRSV.)

TEACHING

As people of faith, we accept and recognize this teaching of Genesis: All creation is the Lord's and we are responsible for the ways that we use it and abuse it. In my United Methodist tradition, our church law calls us to exercise our stewardship of creation with loving care and respect. Specifically regarding animals, the United Methodist Book of Discipline declares that "We support regulations that protect the life and health of animals, including those ensuring the humane treatment of pets and other domestic animals, animals used in research, and the painless slaughtering of meat animals, fish and fowl. We encourage the preservation of all animal species including those threatened with extinction.

PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI FOR ALL CREATED THINGS

As we approach the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, let us recall his prayer for all created things.

O most high, omnipotent, good Lord God, to your belong praise, glory, honor, and all blessing.

For our brother the sun, who is our day and who brings us the light, who is fair, and radiant with a very great splendor, praised be our Lord.

For our sister the moon, and for the stars, which you have set clear and lovely in heaven; praised be our Lord.

For our brother the wind, and for air and clouds, calms and all weather; praised be our Lord.

For our sister water, who serves us and is humble and precious and chaste; praised be our Lord.

For our brother fire, by whom you light up the night, and who is fair and merry, and very mighty and strong; praised be our Lord.

For our mother the earth, who sustains us and keeps us, and brings forth various fruits, and flowers of many colors, and grass; praised be our Lord.

For all those who pardon one another for your love's sake, and who bear weakness and tribulation; praised be our Lord.

Blessed are they who peaceably shall endure, walking by your most holy will; for you, O Most High, shall give them a crown. Praise and bless the Lord and give thanks unto God and serve God with great humility. Amen.

BLESSING

Bless, O Lord, these creatures, and fill our hearts with thanksgiving for their being.

CONCLUDING PRAYER AND SENDING FORTH

Join me in prayer. For animals of every kind, especially those here today, their habitats and health, that they may continue bright and beautiful, teaching us of your wisdom and grace; Hear us, Giver of life.

That all animals be accorded care and respect, especially those we use for food or work, lest we offend against you, their Maker; Hear us, Giver of life.

For people who provide animals with sanctuary, especially those who run Poplar Springs, and for veterinarians and farmers, for purveyors of animal supplies, and for all who care for their own companion animals and those of others; Hear us, Giver of life.

That more and more people may recognize that the protection and nurture of living things is a sacred and joyous trust; Hear us, Giver of life.

For animal companions everywhere and for animals who live in the wild, that we may see reflected in them your goodness and love; Hear us, Giver of life.

Almighty God, your Holy Spirit gives breath to all that lives. Renew us by this same Spirit, that we may respect the creatures you have made, and find delight in them even as you do; Hear us, Giver of life.

And now dear friends, go forth in the glad awareness that just to be a creature of God is a blessing and to justly exercise stewardship over creation is holy living. Rejoice in all creatures, for in wisdom they were created. Amen.

Notes:

This service is adapted from “A Service For the Blessing of Animals,” The United Methodist Book of Worship, Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992, page 608.

The “Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi for All Created Things” is from ” The United Methodist Book of Worship, Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992, page 507.

The teaching cites the United Methodist social principle regarding animal life (paragraph 160.C) from The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2004, Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004, page 97.)

The concluding prayer and blessing is adapted from “Blessing of Animals,” St. Peter’s Episcopal Parish, The Rev. Charles Hoffacker, interim pastor, Poolesville, Maryland, April 28, 2007