

GENESIS 6:17-22

God said, For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life, everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish a covenant with you and you shall come into the ark—you, your sons, your wife and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up, God commanded him.

MATTHEW 6:25-29

Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you even Solomon in all glory was not clothed

like one of these.

ALL CREATURES

Genesis 6:17-22

Matthew 6:25-29

You could say that I am a man after the heart of Saint Francis of Assisi who is said to have wept if he accidentally stepped on a bug. I get it. The closer I come to the end of my life, I hate causing the death of another living being. Even during the annual stink bug season when all those who had been nesting for the winter somewhere in your house wanted to go outside in the spring and could be found crawling up your windows or on your curtains or your walls or your pillow searching for a means of escape, my wife and I had a totally different strategy for dealing with them. She had no pity and eagerly squashed them. I, on the other hand, would capture them when I could and release them to the great outdoors where they wanted to go.

We both love animals—I perhaps more than she—but our two cats, Ossie (who adopted us last summer as a wee kitten; and Larry (an orange tabby) whom we rescued ten years ago, are like our children. They are well-cared-for. So, several weeks ago during the June heatwave, I took him to the vet for his annual leukemia booster which is always traumatic for

him; and I should have just kept him indoors for the rest of the day in case he had a reaction to the vaccine. But as fate would have it, our six-year-old grandson (whom Larry is terrified of) was with us that day. So, when I released Larry from his cat carrier, who do you suppose was the first person he saw?

Understandably, like a stink bug, Larry wanted to flee from the house. So, I went out with him on the porch and groomed him and he seemed fine, after which he left to patrol his territory. No big deal...except that he didn't come home that afternoon and did not respond to my summons which was just not like him. The temperature was 94 degrees and I began to worry. Before dark, I hailed him several more times and then searched his typical haunts. No Larry. He'd had nothing to eat that I know of and more importantly nothing to drink.

I didn't sleep well that night. He had stayed out before, but was always waiting on the porch in the morning. Not this time. I was sure he was dead even though Kathy said she wasn't giving up. I went to play golf as scheduled and was hoping to get a text from her saying he had shown up. Nothing. When I got home, her hope has dissipated as well. So about 4:30, to make myself feel better, I went out and combed the bushes and surrounding areas around our home looking for a corpse. Nada. And

when I sullenly came around to the back, there he was standing in the driveway. The Prodigal had returned and we had a joyful reunion! After which I immediately grounded him!

Even if you're not a pet lover, you cannot overstate the importance of animals in our lives and on our earth. The myth of Noah and his ark makes a dramatic statement about this. God had come to regret creating humans because of their wickedness and was preparing to send the great flood to drown them all. But because Noah had found favor with God, the Lord wanted to give humans a second chance. And it is clear from the story that the Good Lord regarded all other living creatures as equal to humans—even stink bugs. We need each other. Without insects, we wouldn't have food growing in our gardens or fields. Without oceans, we would have no fish or plankton; no water to make rain to support rivers and lakes and no water for crops and vegetation; without forests we would have no oxygen. Everything that exists on this earth needs everything else that exists. It is a system of total interdependence. God loves what God created. *Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.*

The lessons here are so simple. Why do we even have to have environmentalists? Why do we have to make laws to prevent dumping our

garbage into the ocean? Why must we have standards to regulate how food animals must be humanely raised? Is this because of the same arrogance that compelled God to wipe out the human race? The warming climate is the canary in the coal mine. Is it too late? I don't know. All I know for sure is that we cannot continue on the path of profit over love without the direst of consequences. Just remember that we need All Creatures, both the Great and the Small and we share the responsibility to care for them. They are precious...and so are all of our brothers and sisters we share this earth with us.

Rev. Thomas Dunlap August 11, 2024