

Sea Monsters

Psalm 148, Genesis 1:20-31

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And God saw that it was good. Let's continue the idea of both the Genesis and the Psalm a minute. I'm going to divide us into sections and invite you, when I call your section, to speak out loud names of creatures that delight or amaze us which live in the sea or fly in the air or wild animals or domestic animals or even "creeping things!" After each section says the names, we will all respond "and God saw that it was good!"

(Each section goes, include choir and FB too)

We could have included plants, too, and rocks and sun and moon and all the stars in the universe and mountains and trees and, and, and. Each and every piece of creation is described ultimately like this: "God saw that it was very good."

If you remember nothing else I say today, remember this. The purpose of the creation stories in Genesis is not to describe a scientific process. They are not meant to be minute by minute historical fact. They are poetry and theology, not theories or timelines, much as the Psalm is poetry.

The point of these first several chapters of Genesis, and especially the one we read today, is to help us understand that all creation is bound to God, the Creator, and God to the creation, and creation to all its parts. We are bound together with everything God created. We are bound together with our Creator, as is everything else. We humans are not the only ones with a relationship to God, hence the Psalmists call for even the sea monsters to praise God. We are one living reality, inseparable, mutually dependent. And every single part of what God has created has worth. As Hebrew Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann puts it, "...the world has

been positively valued by God for itself [simply for existing]. It must be valued by the creatures to whom it has been entrusted." (Genesis, Interpretation series, p. 13)

And God saw that it was good. God valued everything as it came into being. And so, Brueggemann says, everything is to be valued by the creatures to whom it has been entrusted.

That would be us. Humankind. Made in the image of God. To have "dominion" over all the rest of creation. Dominion is a word that comes from an understanding of how a King or Queen should care for the subjects under them. In the best-case scenario, making sure all those subjects have what they need to thrive so that they can make a profit for the ruler by their work. And certainly, in the creation of human beings, God was assuming the best-case scenario. If it's all good, then surely dominion here does not equate to exploitation, torture, elimination, destruction or de-value-ing in any way. If all creation is tied together to one another and to the creator, then any harm to one part is harm to all. Sometimes people think they have to go to Native American or ancient theologies to come up with this kind of concern for the earth. It is built into the core of Jewish and Christian belief as well, but has been too often forgotten. All creation praises God by its very existence. All of it, as God says, "is very good." And we are supposed to be the ones who have the knowledge and inspiration (by God breathing life into us) to take care of this good creation as God would do so.

When we get all hung up in arguing over the science of Genesis, we utterly miss this critical point that is at the heart of the poem. And by missing that point, some really awful theology results. Some of you may remember a number of years ago, under a different President, we had a Secretary of the Interior who said it was okay for us to exploit and indeed use up all of earth's resources and not be concerned about the extinction of species because God was soon going to destroy this earth and make a new earth. There are so many things wrong about that statement I don't know where to start. Except that maybe the starting place needs to be that all

that was created by God is good, so no matter what happens in a future we cannot predict, our job now is to be caretakers for all this goodness.

We're not doing a great job of it, are we? You know about the recent UN climate report. Did you also hear this week about the historic record-setting dive to one of the deepest parts of the ocean that discovered all kinds of amazing creatures yet unseen by human eyes, as well as plastic.

Now some things about the harm we do to the climate are big, beyond what you and I as individuals can change quickly, though we can advocate with our political and corporate leaders to stop putting their heads in the sand on this issue! But there are still things we can do. Single use plastic of all kinds needs to go the way of dial-up internet service. We need to find ways to drive less and walk, ride, public transport more. Even when it's raining. We need to eat less beef. This is not just a political issue or a social issue. ***This is a faith issue!*** There should not be pieces of plastic in the deepest part of the realm of the sea monsters! They cannot praise their Creator when they are suffocating in our waste, and we are supposed to be the smart ones!

As I wrote this sermon this week, I thought I need to help us do one thing. So, I have used some of my discretionary account to order cotton, reusable grocery bags with the church logo for every family unit in the congregation. I did not spring for the big bucks to get them here by today, but should have them in two weeks. When you use them, think about this: God looked at all parts of creation, and said it was very good. And all creation is made interdependent on each other and God. And all creation is called in its very being to praise God. Not just with our lovely music here, but with our voices and choices every day. Amen.