

**Title: All God's creatures got a place in the choir**

**Text: Mark 7: 24–37; A READING FROM IVONE GEBARA OF BRAZIL**

*Rev. Sharon Smith*

Have you ever put your hand on a tree on a hot day and thanked it for lifting its arms all day to provide you shade?

Have you ever patted a work horse and said thank you for assisting to till the land to give you food?

Have you ever cuddled your dog and said thank you for giving you companionship on lonely nights?

**Identifying with nature happens when we sense a kinship.**

Eco feminism is a lens we take to the world where concepts of gender help us to analyze our relationship as humans to the natural world.

In her book *Quotidian Mysteries: The: Laundry, Liturgy and "Women's Work"*, Kathleen Norris includes this poem written by Margaret Gibson, called making salad:

I rub the dark hollow of the bowl with garlic,  
near to the fire enough so that fire reflects on the wood,  
a reverie that holds emptiness in high regard.  
I watch the leaves swirl and part,  
gathering fresh light from Gemini,  
ten millennia away,  
fresh from Sirius—holding each burning leaf,  
each jewel within whatever light a speck of conscious mind can make,  
unshadowed by reflection or design, impartial.

Out the tap,  
from a source three hundred feet down,  
so close I feel the shudder in the earth,  
water spills over my hands,  
over the scallions still bound in a bunch from the store.  
I had thought to make salad,  
each element cut to precision,  
tossed at random in the turning bowl.  
Now I lay the knife aside.  
I consider the scallions.  
I consider the invisible field.  
Emptiness is bound to bloom—the whole earth, a single flower.

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**There is an intricate connection between justice toward women and nature.**

How is it that this poet gets what Jesus and his disciples seemed so oblivious to in this text, a double faux pas, from Mark's gospel?

Not only does this text tell us that they spoke ill of this woman, but of dogs too?

A very human moment in Jesus as both God and man.

Even those of us who are lovers of nature and of all creatures great and small, use animal slurs in our everyday language.

Calling a person an animal is usually a comment on their unrestrained appetites, especially for food ('like a hungry animal'), or for violence ('they're like wild animals'). We also have purpose-made insults comparing people to specific kinds of animal: pig, chicken, rat, cow, slug, snake, etc.

This does not excuse us. Rather it should be a mirror for our awareness and self correction.

How we speak betrays us, revealing some underlying belief.

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The **Hebrew Scriptures** tell us that animal welfare is a deeply theological concern: The writer of Genesis writes that God is a Creator and the Creator of all living things. The Creator actually loves all of creation that means that there's nothing that's left out. It means that every plant every acre of land every mountain and every living creature has value placed upon it by the Creator.

And in most of the rest of the **Gospels** we read that Jesus words reveal this same value: Jesus said that not a sparrow falls to the ground without God noticing and caring. Jesus uses God's care for animals as the baseline to talk about care for us.

*(From Brian McLaren's SARX: Are Animal Issues Christian Issues)*

**Tradition** records the words of our saints sharing this same message:

Hildegard of Bingen that wonderful 12<sup>th</sup> century German mystic writes: "All living creatures are sparks from the radiation of God's brilliance, emerging from God like the rays of sun."

Saint Francis of Assisi prayed to God to work through him to help animals as well as people, and said of animals: "Not to hurt our humble brethren is our first duty to them, but to stop there is not enough. We have a higher mission — to be of service to them wherever they require it."

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It is unfortunate that in the history of Christendom we have embraced the language of dominion and stewardship thinking of animals as property.

- Domesticated animals have provided countless services to us – in work, at play, and in war – with little regard on our part for their safety.
- Non-domesticated animals have been a threat, or a nuisance, or have lived in places we want to live, and we have done our best to eradicate them and to make their habitat our own.
- Farm animals have provided an inexpensive and ready food source – and factory farms make the food even more inexpensive and ready – if only we will close our eyes to the conditions the animals confined in them must endure and the methods used to bring them to our tables.

We also have often pitted human suffering against animal suffering, weighing one as more important than the other.

So for some people, it is difficult to take seriously the suffering of animals when there is so much human suffering in the world.

Author Matthew Scully explains: “[J]ustice is not a finite commodity, nor are kindness and love. Where we find wrongs done to animals, it is no excuse to say that more important wrongs are done to human beings, and let us concentrate on those. A wrong is a wrong, and often the little ones, when they are shrugged off as nothing, spread and do the gravest harm to ourselves and others.”

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If animals are our equals in creation, then we owe them that respect; if you find that hard to wrap your head around, then think of it this way - we owe them mercy in the face of their powerlessness.

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Brian McLaren writes:

“If we as Christians were to join God and God's concern for creation including and especially sentient creation and animal life I think it would affect our lives in a number of ways:

- it would make us more concerned about the conditions in which our food has grown
- it might make us more willing to eat more of a plant-based diet than an animal-based diet
- and we might care more about how we have separated them from the habitats in which they live”

The animals we have in our lives, become like kin and they teach us so much:

One woman wrote about what her dog Chloe taught her...

Whenever I entered our house, Chloe and I had our greeting ritual: with rapidly wagging tail, she circled my feet, awaiting petting or a belly rub, and always, my greeting, "Hey, buddy, how ya doin'?" Most of all, we had a few seconds of quiet, steady eye contact and a profound connection.

She taught me to **Show others your love and appreciate them.**

**She taught me to be content with simple things.**

Ah, the joy of a chew toy or a small treat to brighten up the day! How wonderful to walk with the wind in one's floppy ears and chase the squirrels! It took very little to set off a wagging tail or happy jumps at the prospect of any of these. I often pray for the gift of biblical joy that Jesus promises us even when life is difficult, and hope wanes. God, please give me the grace to enjoy the many simple pleasures you give me daily and — like Chloe — show you how much I appreciate them.

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**I end with this prayer for and with endangered species – Salal and Cedar**

We pray in this place, this watershed, this holy ground, this Coast Salish territory, remembering its creatures in danger and asking them respectfully, humbly to be with and rise up with us.

murrelets, band-tailed pigeons, western screech owls, spotted owls, horned lark, and short-tailed albatross and all you birds  
pray for us, rise with us

basking sharks, humpback whales, orcas and blue whales, black right whale, steller's sea and all you sea creatures  
pray for us, rise with us

california sword fern, old growth specklebelly lichen, phantom orchid, prairie buttercup, spurred lupine... and all you plants  
pray for us, rise with us

salish sucker, chinook salmon, fraser eulachon, fraser sturgeon, nooksack dace... and all you fish  
pray for us, rise with us

coastal giant salamanders, oregon forest snails, Northern Red legged frogs, pigmy short-horned lizard  
and all you amphibians and reptiles  
pray for us, rise with us  
pacific water shrews, woodland caribou, long tailed weasels, roosevelt elk, western harvest

mouse... and all you land mammals  
pray for us, rise with us

western bumblebees, magnum mantleslugs, island blue butterflies, threaded vertigos...  
and all you invertebrates  
pray for us, rise with us,  
AMEN