

Genesis 1:20-2:3

As we think about animals and talk about pets with the children I have to admit to feeling under a certain amount of pressure at home.

My daughters ninth birthday is fast approaching and top of her birthday present wish list is a puppy.

In fact it's top of the list with a double underline and 'please, please, please, please' written beside it.

Now I like animals but I'm not sure in the chaos of our family we are ready for the responsibility of a pet, however it does make clear how much many of us love animals and the part they play in our lives.

Well, I know that in the last few weeks you have been going through the creation story in Genesis 1 and today we bring that to a close with the last 3 days of the week. The earth has been created,

the light,
the land,
the sea,
trees, plants,
sun, moon and stars.

The stage is set waiting for living creatures to enter and enjoy the blessings of God's creation. I want to consider three points this morning

God created animals,
therefore we have responsibilities.

God made mankind, so we have value

God rested, so we have peace

[God created animals, therefore we have responsibilities.](#)

Perhaps it is no surprise given the vast multitude of animals that God split their creation over two days!

On the fifth day God created sea creatures and birds

'let the water teem with living creatures' he said

And doesn't it just teem! Think of the ocean creatures we love to watch like a dolphin or a whale, some of them we are a bit scared of like a shark or even a jellyfish but our oceans and rivers certainly do teem with more living creatures than we could even name or imagine.

Figures suggest that there are about 32 thousand different species of fish alone! The census of marine life published in 2010 took a decade to record 230 thousand different species in our oceans but also admitted that for every species recorded at least 4 more have still to be identified. And that's just the oceans..

God then said 'let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of sky' and he created all the birds that fly and sing.

What a delight birds can be, whether that's a kingfisher by the river or a little robin on a cold winter's day

Perhaps some of you are avid bird watchers or just like watching them visit your garden. Again the vast range of species of birds is so huge that each of us probably only know or see a small snapshot of them.

Then on the sixth day God created land animals, domestic and wild, those that walk, crawl, slither, run, dig or climb. He created them all.

and v25 'God saw that it was good' - God looked on creation, all the animals and creatures he had made and saw that it was good. He was pleased with what had been made. The fish, the birds, the wild animals, the domestic animals – it was all good.

Then to further demonstrate God's love for his creation, he blessed them. He blessed the animals to be fruitful and to flourish.

He created them, loves them and delights in how they inhabit the whole of the earth.

There is an ongoing connection between the creator and his creatures, even the animals. The psalmist writes (148)

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
¹⁰ wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds

So God made animals, delighted in them and blessed them but what does it mean for us? Because God made animals so we have responsibilities.

Firstly a responsibility to delight in creation and then a responsibility to care for it.

I have a three year old son and I wonder if any of you can relate to taking a toddler for a walk. A simple walk to the corner shop, which should take me 2 minutes can take half an hour. My son will stop to bend over and look in a bush at a spider spinning its web, shouting 'look daddy look'

He'll stand for ages watching it before spotting an ant running across the ground and then hearing a bird and looking round to try and spot it. Just when I think we are making progress the neighbour's cat comes over to say hello and this is all before we've actually got out the garden gate!

So this passage reminds us to keep our eyes open and thank God for the nature that we see around us this week.

What has happened to our own childlike wonder at the creation around us. We have a responsibility to thank God for the amazing world of nature that we often walk straight through without noticing. We should remember to treat this as a gift from God to enjoy.

But the second strand of our responsibility is to care for nature.

V26 states that mankind was created to 'rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth'

We have been put in a position of responsibility and at times mankind has abused that responsibility by hurting animals, destroying habitats and leading to extinction of species.

Our position isn't that of a dictator where we dominate for our own means. The picture is more of a trusted estate manager. Or like the friend who asks you to feed her cat while she is on holiday, we don't own the animals but we are to care for them for our master.

We are to fulfil our duty to God by caring for and not neglecting animals.

However there is a balance – the animals are important but amazingly we as human beings have been made as the pinnacle of creation.

Consider Matthew 6:26 when Jesus says

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”

God’s values us more than the other creatures. Why? Because we are created in his image. That’s our second point

[God created us in his image, therefore we have value.](#)

V27

‘God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.’

Three times in that one verse we read that we have been created. We have a creator. That reinforces our responsibilities. If no-one had created us then we would have no one to answer to but instead we will each one day give an account of ourselves to our creator.

However the main part I want us to focus on here is that we are made ‘in the image of God’.

Made in the image of God

What does that actually mean? John’s gospel reminds us that ‘God is Spirit’ (4:24), he doesn’t have a bodily form so it can’t mean that we share his appearance.

Instead we have attributes that we share with God that the other creatures of the world don’t. We are to reflect something of those qualities.

There’s a moral, element to our being
a rational element to our minds
a spiritual dimension to being made in the image of God.

We have self awareness, self consciousness, a instinct to worship.

I suppose if you think of a little baby being born you might say

‘awww she’s got her mum’s eyes’

And then as she grows, she starts to take on more and more of her mum’s personality, her attitudes, her mannerisms, her traits and become even more an image of her mum.

In a similar way as we are foggy, darkened images of God, imitating him in our child like ways but never perfectly showing his character. However we should seek and hope to grow in his image.

When we grow closer to God we become more the person we have been created to be. When we show the fruits of the spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control we are becoming more in the true image of God that we are called to.

Our second reading this morning from Colossians gives us the best guidance

Talking of Jesus, Paul wrote

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation”

If we want to know what God is like then Jesus is the perfect image of God.

He was Immanuel God with us, here to show us the character, personality and attributes of God.

The walking talking perfect example of God,

If we want our own lives to live up to bearing ‘the image of God’ then we seek to follow Jesus and become more like him.

What does it mean come Monday morning to realise we are made in the image of God. Well crucially, it gives us value, self worth.

Perhaps you don’t feel you have value,
maybe you think that you’re not important.

Many of us struggle to believe we really have anything to contribute.

To return to the illustration of a baby you can look at a newborn and see the image of God in a baby, you can look down and see the absolute beauty, the value, the miracle of this life but what happens to us along the way, that somehow many of us reach adult hood and feel worthless or full of self doubt. That we feel we’re nothing special, that we are of **no value**?

If you could see the image of God in the new born baby nothing has happened that can have made you less special to God now.

You are a person created in the image of God.
That’s something that should WOW us!

It should also keep to the forefront of our mind the dignity that each person deserves.

For the sick, the bereaved, the imprisoned, the abused, the poor and the defenceless, the youngest and the eldest. Each one is made in the image of God.

I know that you send a team out on the Bethany care van which is brilliant. To serve soup and rolls to people living on the streets recognising that each one is made in the image of God and is precious to him.

Maybe remembering that every one of the people we meet this week is made in the image of God will help us

The awkward colleague at work, the really slow driver on the road in front of you, the hugely irritating telesales guy. Each one made in the image of God and to mistreat another human being is to betray God.

In John’s first letter he writes

‘Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.’

To love one another is to be made in the image of God. To live in community with each other.

It also holds in the bigger issues of life, at the end of life, for those no longer able to look after themselves, for those in nursing homes. Each one made in the image of God and of value and deserving of dignity.

We are all made to reflect God’s image but that only happens if we are living in communion with him for that is the way we were created to be.

That's one of the reasons we gather here on a Sunday and also to live out our final point

God rested, therefore we have peace.

Chapter 2 v 2 'by the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; soon the seventh day he rested'

God saw all that he had made and it was good, it was very good!

And so God rested because his work was done, the earth was created

Creation was so good that God could rest, nothing more needed to be done. God would institute a pattern of work and rest that we desperately need today. We too need to find rest, in a world of pressure, where we get a faster phone, a faster car, a faster computer to save seconds.

Where we answer work emails all weekend, and work longer hours, trying to do more and more in every day.

God says rest, it is good to rest.

To have a day to stop, a day that looks and feels different from the rest of the week.

It's not about a legalistic way of saying no-one is allowed to have any fun as a good Presbyterian Sabbath might have been viewed in generations past

but it's about saying you should stop, the world doesn't need you to work every minute of every day, instead God wants you to stop and make some time for him.

Jesus said Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

In Jesus we find peace, not just peace from hectic 21st century activities but peace in our souls. Saint Augustine wrote

"our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee"

He wrote that in the 4th century so he wasn't struggling to get rest from his smartphone, he was admitting that until we turn to follow Jesus we will always have that restless feeling. We'll never feel quite at home.

Until we find communion with the one who made us in his image we can't find true peace.

In the Colossians passage it goes on to say

V22 'he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation'

Through Jesus we find a way to live up to being made in the image of God. God made mankind, so we have value and when we come to Jesus we can have peace.