



# Ravensworth

## BAPTIST CHURCH

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**May 15, 2022 | Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**Job 12: 7-10**

**Holy Creatures**

**Anna Rullan-Garcia, preaching**

Job 12: 7-10: (MSG) “But ask the animals what they think—let them teach you; let the birds tell you what’s going on. Put your ear to the earth—learn the basics. Listen—the fish in the ocean will tell you their stories. Isn’t it clear that they all know and agree that God is sovereign, that God holds all things in God’s hand—every living soul, yes, every breathing creature? Isn’t this all just common sense, as common as the sense of taste? Do you think the elderly have a corner on wisdom, that you have grown old before you understand life?

When was the last time you saw your reflection? In the mirror this morning? On a zoom meeting this week? But when was the last time you really looked? Intently. Not with criticism but with kindness and love. With wonder and curiosity. The stories we carry are written on our faces, in the tiny wrinkles that are formed by the mouth. They are found on our backs, and in the way we use our hands. My grandmother’s hands made corn tortillas. They felt like velvet against my skin. Her hands were slender yet strong. They fed her family when she fled Mexico into Texas as a young woman, they nourished her body and, in some ways, her soul too. She carried a spiritual legacy that I am learning to unpack, rich with hope and pain. It is faith embodied. A biblical faith attached to nature, the earth and her body. This faith is in my bones.

I feel her faith when my feet touch grass, when my fingers outline the tiny hairs of a caterpillar, when the sun’s warmth swallows my brown skin, and when I taste a homemade corn tortilla filled with spinach, mozzarella, and butter dripping down my chin. I find God in these tiny pieces.

And my heart remembers my abuelita, who I affectionately called “Lita”. Lita married a man I never met. He passed when I was inside my mother’s womb. I am told that he too had an embodied faith. He understood God in the earth and animals. I am told that when it rained, he stood outside for hours worshipping. He was a rancher by skill. So, his heart knew the harshness of drought, which is why I think he sang to God when it rained. They say he talked to his pets as he read Scripture aloud. Perhaps my abuelito understood something many do not. Maybe, the animals spoke back.

In our Scripture today, Job tells us that the animals teach us. Job is addressing his friends who are questioning and mocking him. Specifically, his friend, Zophar. Job is examining the superiority of hidden wisdom, and God's careful supervision and ordering of the world. This short excerpt of wisdom discourse challenges the appeals made by Job's friends. Zophar argues that Job cannot attain the boundary of God's knowledge. But Job counters by shifting the argument away from what is not attainable to what is. Zophar's desire that God would reveal to Job hidden wisdom is countered by Job's insistence that God already has. All that is necessary to know is readily available everywhere in the cosmos, especially in the animals. The birds of the air, the fish in the ocean, they all wait to tell us their stories.

I wonder what sorts of stories animals hold. They were among some of the first created beings on earth! Have the animals seen colors we are not yet familiar with? Have they seen glory that cannot be described in words? I imagine the stories written on their bodies. Their paws, beaks, whiskers, all contain divine secrets. Job urges us to listen to them. He urges us to put our ears to the ground and listen to the dirt. The dirt beneath our feet will teach us the basics. There is a science behind being grounded in creation. Connecting with the dirt can calm us, re-center us, and even heal us. Nutritionist and author Carrie Dennett wrote about grounding in the Washington Post in 2018. She writes: "The idea behind grounding is humans evolved in direct

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contact with the Earth's subtle electric charge, but we've lost that sustained connection thanks to inventions such as buildings, furniture and shoes with insulated synthetic soles. Advocates of grounding say this disconnect might be contributing to the chronic diseases that are particularly prevalent in industrial societies. Research has shown that barefoot contact with the earth can produce nearly instant changes in a variety of physiological measures, helping improve sleep, reduce pain, decrease muscle tension and lower stress." The dirt can save us.

Kat Armas, author of "Abuelita Faith", writes, "One of the greatest devastations of colonization is that it ripped people from land; from the plants and animals that were a part of their families. What was once a holistic identity mirrored by the goodness of Genesis 1 soon became a fragmented and distorted identity. The land—which belonged to no one but God—quickly became private property and a natural resource for consumption. What if we stopped seeing earth as property or resource and instead as kin? Perhaps then we could be whole." It seems as if our wholeness is dependent on a sacred attention to dirt and animals. Dirt—what we are made from, what many regard as messy and unclean, what many have exploited in the name of progress, is what will teach us. Put your ear to the ground says Job. The very dirt beneath your feet, the dirt that is in your bones, wants to speak. We need dirt. We are interdependent with it and its holy creatures. Their flourishing is also our flourishing.

Perhaps then our collective wholeness is found in slowing down, a holy attention to creation, a holy listening. Job says to let the birds tell us what's going, and I believe the birds are eager to teach us. Just three weeks ago, Elias and I were walking our daily neighborhood route while Gael took his morning nap. An orange breasted bird perched on our neighbor's front door sang

as we turned the corner. We both stood captivated, unable to move as we soaked in the interconnectedness of this moment. This bird sang to us! I was so excited. I said Elias, "Look!

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The bird is talking to us. He laughed and said, "mommy, happy!" I said, "Yes! The bird is happy. God is happy, we are all happy together."

Indeed, there is a peace that holy creatures understand. A joy cultivated from simplicity. Wendell Berry writes in his book, "The Peace of Wild Things", "All goes back to the earth, and so I do not desire pride of excess or power, but the contentment made by men who have had little: the fisherman's silence receiving the river's grace, the gardener's musing on rows. I lack the peace of simple things." What makes children so prone to awe is their capacity to embrace simplicity. We are so hurried; we often do not make time to awe at simple things. The intricate design of a butterfly, the tiny spots on a ladybug, the playfulness of a squirrel playing tricks on his neighbor, these are simple things. And yet, these animals know who their creator is. They understand that God holds every breathing creature together in a delicate balance of shalom. God's dignity stretched out over the cosmos like a blanket. God's glory extended to all creatures. These are the secrets of the universe animals understand.

When was the last time you listened to an animal speak of God's glory? Job tells us that animals know God's sovereignty. But our ability to listen is also dependent on our capacity for spiritual imagination. Cole Arthur Riley says in her book, "This Here Flesh", "Wonder then is a force of liberation. It makes sense of what our souls inherently know we were meant for...my faith is held together by wonder—by every defiant commitment to presence and paying attention." As I read Job's instructions to learn from the animals, I keep returning to wonder. Our spiritual imagination can lead us to wonder. Our wonder can free us from bondage.

When the grasshopper passes do you notice the spring in her step? She is light and purposeful, held together by wonder. What about the bird perched on your window while you drink your morning coffee? Have you listened to him tell you about the first time he sang to God? Perhaps

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his voice sounded like poetry. It is breath taking to hold a caterpillar in your hand and feel her tiny hairs. She will teach you of God's majesty. I find God in the spotted underbelly of my dog, Snickers, sprawled out on our couch, paws in the air like he knows his worth. And he is worthy. Every inch of his speckled paw speaks of divinity. If we slow down, we can learn about God through these tiny pieces of glory on earth. And why shouldn't we? These holy creatures are kin, held together by wonder. Every inch of their bodies draws us closer to the divine. Thanks be to God.

So, for those of you who enjoy homework, this week your assignment is to spend time with animals. Whether in the wild or at home, I encourage you to be intentional about creating space for just you and an animal of your choosing. Our RBC staff looks forward to hearing about what you learn from God's holy creatures this week. And for those who submitted names and photos

of your beloved pets, a huge thank-you! Seeing these beauties emailed or texted throughout the week brought many smiles to my face. And it also made me thankful for a Christian history which includes scholars and saints, like St. Francis who began blessing our animals centuries ago. His claim that humans are only a small part in the larger web of creation, affirms the dignity and blessedness of all creatures. We too at RBC, affirm the dignity and holiness of our pets. We look forward to the time in our church when we can bless our animals in person, but for now we bless them from afar. I will recite our pet names aloud before we responsively read a litany of blessing, holding them in sacred wonder.