

Sermon: God Bless Humans Bless Creation Bless God
Scripture: Isaiah 11
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
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Usually we hear this scripture at Christmas time, a beautiful account of the Peaceable Kingdom, the promise and hope the Messiah brings that one day there will be no more hurting of one another throughout all creation; that dogs and cats, predator and prey, humans with humans will all live in care and harmony. Though written some 3000 years ago, the words are timeless and maybe more timely now than ever before.

For in Jewish and Christian religious understanding, the human being, creation, and God are intricately connected, everything that happens to one affects the others. It's a strange but beautiful claim of the Hebrew people that God is not some distant far-removed deity in the heavens unaffected by the things of this world, but rather God's heart is in this world. All life and all matter is pulsing with the energy of the Divine. Just as Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus and rejoiced at the healing of Mary Magdelene, so too do we believe that God's heart aches when ours' aches and swells when ours swells, and creation itself rejoices and mourns in concert with God. The Psalmist writes "the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout, they sing together with joy!" And in Isaiah, "The wilderness and dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom with joy and singing."

And who among us, as humans, do not witness the songs of birds or a bee alighting in a flower or the changing colors of leaves without it

touching something in our souls. Who of us have ever lost a pet or seen an animal wounded by the roadside or caught images of a clear-cut forest without also feeling the loss and grief in our souls, all of which effects God's heart too.

And in this remarkable interchange and exchange and interconnectedness of human, creation, and God, humans hold a special place between the natural world and God, placed as caretakers or stewards of the world that God so loves... endowed with the capacity to create, we also have the terrible capacity to destroy unlike any other animal. The ancient Hebrew people didn't have to know that we would create weapons of mass destruction or threaten the ozone layer and cause extinction of species one day to posit that the wounded waywardness of humanity not only wounds God but also results in the wounding of the earth herself. Isaiah says some 3000 years ago with prescience "the earth mourns and withers, the earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws and broken covenant with me, say the Lord." The human covenant with God is intricately connected to it's care for the earth and in this way we have broken covenant time and again.

Some Christians claim that God will do the saving and there's nothing we can do or that it doesn't really matter in the end what we do, that if we destroy the earth it'll hasten the End Times when Christ will come again. But this is so many kinds of wrong – morally, spiritually, biblically.

God covenants with us through Israel and through Jesus and through who knows what other religions so that we humans will participate in the creative loving and redeeming of the world. And in our

incredible and terrible free choice we can decide whether to make of our lives a loving expression of God's will or a thwarting of it, a furthering of God's purposes to bless this earth or a squandering of it. And if we want our lives to bless this earth then we must donate ourselves to those around us - our friends, our children, our pets, the little plot of land we might have, the watershed within which we live, the air we breath, the wider human community, the creatures we come in contact with and so on and so forth.

How can we simply, step by step, choice by choice, make ever better decisions about how we are living for the love for God, for the love of God's creation and for the love of one another? We start with today and we start with those beside us and at the end of our leashes and as we bless our animals we are acknowledging their preciousness in God's sight and we seek to make the whole of our lives a blessing, particularly to those - human and nonhuman alike - who are the most vulnerable among us. Then we participate in God's divine blessed economy which goes like this unbroken circle of blessing: God blesses humans who bless creation who bless God who blesses creation who blesses humans who bless God and so on and so forth forever more... Amen!

Abstract:

God, humans, and the natural world are often presented as separate from one another – one in the sky, one on the earth, one as the earth.

Biblical teaching is that the three are intricately interconnected and what happens to one is felt by all.

God's covenant with conscious humanity requires good and faithful treatment of others including the natural world, especially the most vulnerable others.

To become most fully who we are meant to be as human being, we receive and convey God's blessings.

God blesses humanity who blesses creation who blesses God who blesses creation who blesses humanity and so on and so forth.