

Of Hawks, Crows, Budgies and Deer
A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC
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For the Blessing of the Animals

Luke 12:22-32

22 Jesus said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. **23** For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. **24** Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! **25** And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? **26** If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? **27** Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. **28** But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! **29** And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. **30** For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. **31** Instead, strive for God's kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. **32** 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Ravens, it turns out, are smart birds. They are problem solvers. Scientists have convinced them to solve puzzles.

But, let's face it, they're not attractive or melodious.

Some cultures revere them, but in the ancient near east they were looked down upon as scavengers and pests.

Yet Jesus called them out particularly as objects of God's care. And Jesus invited us to learn from the ravens.

And when this part of Jesus' sermon on the plain ended, he called us - human beings, his followers - members of his flock.

You could read this as saying humans are more important than, or superior to, the birds and the lilies.

But today at least I'll interpret Jesus to mean that even the crows, and even the lilies, and even the human beings - all of us - are precious in God's sight. Even the deer and even the budgies and even the dogs and even the turtles and even the neighbor. Precious in God's sight, and beloved. And a blessing, and worthy of blessing.

There was a lost budgie - a little yellow bird - flying about Arlington last week. The Arlington List Facebook group got frequent reports about this tiny creature, just a few ounces in weight. The budgie was seen on this street. People went to the pet store to buy special budgie food. The budgie took a little food from one person's porch but she couldn't catch them. Posters were up all over town - *is this your budgie?* Word came that the budgie's leg was injured. 151 people followed the tale of the budgie, until this tiny, precious creature was captured and taken to the vet for care - where it still is.

A tiny, fragile, precious creature - and a community determined to care for it.

Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them.

And so we have something to learn from the animals around us today - those on leashes and those nesting in the trees.

Yes, times are hard - and it is still good news that God cares for us. Yes, our environment is in trouble and we are all, all, called to determined action to correct climate change. And - there is still good news all around us. The animals tell us this truth. And we, too, a members of God's flock.

Barbara Mahany says: "simple gestures of kindness - between creature and child, creature and whomever takes care ... open us up to reciprocities and little read epistles of wonder and awe."¹

This season of creation, you might have tracked that I'm talking about spiritual resilience in the face of scary environmental times. One sure way to build our spiritual resilience is to notice and care for the animals around us - the birds of the sky, the deer in the forest. For those of us with animal companions, we have the blessing of even more connection to creation. They witness in their very breath to God's love the wonder of this world. And we know that what we love, we protect. Thanks be to God, our Creator. Amen.

¹ Mahany, Barbara. *The Book of Nature: The Astonishing Beauty of God's First Sacred Text*. Broadleaf Books, Minneapolis, 2023. P. 73.