

Blessing of the Animals 2015  
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### The “It-ness” of God’s Creation

The novelist Alice Walker tells the story of a horse named Blue who was boarded in a field beside the house where she lived. The horse, alone in the field day after day was, she says, lonely and bored. When Blue would find her in the yard near his fence, near a big apple tree, he would come and want to be near her:

*But then, in our second year at the house, something happened in Blue’s life. One morning, looking out the window at the fog that lay like a ribbon over the meadow, I saw another horse, a brown one, at the other end of Blue’s field. Blue appeared to be afraid of it, and for several days made no attempt to go near. We went away for a week. When we returned, Blue had decided to make friends and the two horses ambled and galloped along together, and Blue did not come nearly as often to the fence underneath the apple tree.*

*When he did, bringing his new friend with him, there was a different look in his eyes. A look of independence, self-possession, of inalienable horseness. His friend eventually became pregnant. For months and months there was, it seemed to me, a mutual feeling between me and the horses of justice, of peace. I fed apples to them both. The look in Blue’s eyes was one of unabashed “this is it-ness.”<sup>1</sup>*

But soon the visiting horse was sent back to its owner, with impregnation completed. Walker says that Blue became “like a crazed person,” whinnying and tearing at the ground, and when she looked into his piercing eyes, she adds, “If I had been born into slavery, and my partner had been sold or killed, my eyes would have looked like that.”

Walker’s conclusion is that “we are one lesson.” As we treat animals so we treat people and vice versa. Profound connections exist between oppressing other people and oppressing nature---the arrogant eye, she says, is trained on both.

Everything in God’s creation deserves it’s own “this is it-ness,” deserves to have what is necessary to be whole and brought to fullness of life; the created order deserves our mutuality, our understanding that we are interdependent and as one goes so does the other.

God created a brilliant and beautiful eco-system, one in which the health and welfare of one species is vastly dependent on every other thing in that system.

As theologian Sally McFague says: This interrelationship is so thorough so profound that we usually do not see it. She asks, “Could a fish answer the question, what is the ocean?”

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<sup>1</sup> Alice walker, *Living by the Word: Selected Writings, 1973-87* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1988), 6.

Those of you sitting in the pews with your animal companions beside you know your animals experience their “it-ness.” You have seen in their eyes its unique and individual spark and you know when that spark is not present.

These are often the times when we grow concerned and call the vet and when they ask what the problem is we say, “I don’t know—he’s just not doing right.”

And if you have or have had multiple animals share your life, you know that they are all so very different in their likes and dislikes and can be quite self-determined, what gives them each their it-ness can be very different!

These creatures that share our homes bring us right up close to a truth that exists in all of nature.

All of God’s creation is its own good, has its own purpose; to believe that all of creation, it’s animals and it’s natural resources are here only to be exploited for our use, is a form of madness.

This is why I am so thankful for those like Francis of Assisi.

He had the ability to see and treat the natural world in the same way we are meant to see and treat God and other people---as something that is good in themselves-- as opposed to seeing God, people or nature as objects---simply as something that can provide us with something we need or want.

Francis saw God in all things. He did not see people and nature simply as signs pointing to God or as symbols transparent to God. He saw each and everything God created as telling of the glory of God in its own distinctiveness.

Francis’ way was to commune with all things, reverencing them and respecting their differences and distinctions; he let things *be* what they were, *as* they were as opposed to how he could change them or make them into a commodity.

This was and still is a radical perspective. Francis’ love of nature wasn’t a cute and fuzzy distraction from caring for the poor, it was essential element of how he loved and responded to God *and* people.

McFague, whose work inspires me, says that Francis’ viewpoint is shocking to contemporary Christians. She points out that we have become accustomed to objectifying both people and the natural world as simply resources to be used. But Francis saw animals, trees, wildflowers, and people as an end or a good in and of themselves, not something to be exploited.

He thought that all of the created order had individual worlds, goals, needful intentions, and a promise of flourishing that makes everything God created holy. For Francis, our

ability to love our neighbor as ourselves was closely linked to how we respected all of God's creation.

Francis would completely get Alice Walker's understanding of Blue's "it-ness moment."

That is why days like today are so important. It reminds us of this truth or maybe enlightens us to it for the first time.

Today as we give thanks for these creatures that share our homes and lives we acknowledge that each one of them, just like us, is a witness to God's creative genius.

As Alice Walker says, "we are one lesson." As we treat animals so we also treat people. Profound connections exist between oppressing other people and oppressing nature. She says people and animals are all co-conspirator's, those who literally breathe together: we are one community breathing in and breathing out.

We are all, literally, bone of the bone, flesh of the flesh of nature. We come from it and we return to it and every waking moment is dependent on the air we breathe, the water we drink, and every food substance that we eat.

Francis taught that nature is not "just" nature. He reminds us today that as one sees the face of Christ in the needy brother or sister, that nature, in its own very distinctive way, is a vision of God. Amen.