

First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, AL

The Rev. Terry Hamilton-Poore

**Job 12:7-10**

Ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among these does not know that the hand of God has done this? In God's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.

**Proverbs 30:18-19, 24-28**

Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a woman. Four things on earth are small, yet they are exceedingly wise: the ants are a people without strength, yet they provide their food in the summer; the badgers are a people without power, yet they make their homes in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank; the lizard can be grasped in the hand, yet it is found in kings' palaces.

**1 Corinthians 12:14-26**

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chose.

If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

The church I served in California was built on the side of a small mountain, with acres of open space right behind it. Turkeys and deer and even the occasional coyote would wander through the churchyard on a regular basis. My favorite creatures, though, were the lizards.

I remember one day, in particular, when I was going through a very difficult time in my life. I couldn't sleep, and couldn't think about much else beyond the crisis I was in; but that afternoon, I was stepping out of the door to go home, when suddenly, a little, gray lizard scurried out from the rocks and paused right in front of me on the dusty sidewalk. He blinked, looked around, did a couple of little pushups, and scurried off again.

That moment made me laugh, and shook me out of myself. There was something about how small that lizard was, yet how complete—this little, self-contained being, who knew nothing about anything that was going on in my life, but who had its own life—its own, separate existence, right outside my doorway. It gave me perspective. It reminded me that there was a whole world out there, with more beings than I could number of all different sizes and species. I was just one creature among many.

In this sermon series on Earth Care, we've been following the seven themes from Sam Hamilton-Poore's book, *Earth Gospel*. Today's theme is "Wisdom: or Creation Teaches." Creation does, indeed, teach, from the moment we're born.

When we drop our first Cheerio over the edge of our high chair, we learn about gravity. When we plant our first seed in our grandmother's garden, we learn that other living things have needs, like water and sun; and when we check on it every few minutes expecting to see a sprout, we learn that growth takes time.

When we play outside in the evening and come home with mosquito bites, or when we ignore our parents' warnings and touch a cactus, or when someone we know gets bitten by a copperhead, we learn to be alert to danger.

When our cat brings home a dead chipmunk, we learn about the food chain. When that same cat dies after years in the family, we learn about mortality and sorrow.

Creation teaches. It teaches about the cyclical nature of time as we move through the seasons; it teaches about the linear nature of time, as we grow taller and older; it teaches about birth and death, beauty and destruction, cause and effect. Creation teaches.

Our scripture passages today all talk about the ways in which creation opens our minds to wonder, and gives us insight into how to live. “Ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you;” Job says to his friends, mocking the limits of their knowledge.

“Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand:” says Proverbs, only to go on and list many more than four that stand as a mystery, including the lizard, this creature that seems so insignificant, yet can invade the privacy of kings.

When we speak of creation, we act as though we stand apart—as though nature were something separate from us, something for us to use, and even use up—a product for our benefit. For a long time, that almost seemed to be the case. There was so much air in the atmosphere, that we seemed to be able to pump poison into it with impunity. So much land, that we could use it up and move on. So much water, that we could dump garbage scows in the ocean, have green lawns in the middle of the desert, and never run out of drinkable water.

Now, as species are disappearing and the climate is changing catastrophically, what nature is teaching us is that actions have consequences, and that we are interconnected with all of the creatures and systems of the earth. “Indeed, the body

does not consist of one member but of many,” 1 Corinthians reminds us, and “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.” That includes us.

We’ve been slow learners, and now things seem so far gone that we’re in danger of giving up—just throwing our hands in the air and thinking that nothing we do can make a difference. I think that, sometimes, too—but then, I stumble across things like this video that we’re about to watch together.

[view <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8nyIyPZy68> ]

This video gives me hope. If a small pack of wolves can nudge an entire ecosystem toward a healthy balance, then so can we. Like those wolves, we are one part of a greater whole. If our actions can bring damage to the whole system—as we know they can—then our actions can also bring healing to the whole system. But first, like the wolves, we need to be restored to our rightful place in that ecosystem. Next week, when the theme is Human Vocation, we will look more closely at what that rightful place is. But of one thing we can be sure: we can no longer act as owners of the system to use it as we please, or as gods to control it—because we see now that we cannot control it.

But we can humble ourselves, and be part of it. We can start learning from lizards and gaining wisdom from wolves, because we're all in this together.

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it;” Corinthians tells us, and the evidence of that is all around us; but, adds Corinthians, “if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”

So, let's step back into our rightful place, and treat the rest of creation with respect and care, honoring each little lizard and every molecule of water as the work of God's hand, with a rightful and necessary place on this planet, and with something to teach us.

In doing so, may the balance of nature gradually be restored, so that, someday, we can all rejoice together.