



“Consider the Furry, Scaly, Feathered, Wet Ones”

A sermon preached by E. Scott Winnette

Job 12: 7-10

June 14, 2020

Mary Oliver - “How Would You Live Then?”

What if a hundred rose-breasted grosbeaks
flew in circles around your head? What if
the mockingbird came into the house with you and
became your advisor? What if
the bees filled your walls with honey and all
you needed to do was ask them and they would fill
the bowl? What if the brook slid downhill just
past your bedroom window so could listen
to its slow prayers as you fell asleep? What if
the stars began to shout their names, or to run
this way and that way above the clouds? What if
you painted a picture of a tree, and the leaves
began to rustle, and a bird cheerfully sang
from its painted branches? What if you suddenly saw
that the silver of water was brighter than the silver
of money? What if you finally saw
that the sunflowers, turning toward the sun all day
and every day – who knows how, but they do it – were
more precious, more meaningful than gold?

The poet asks, "How Would You Live Then?"

Our smallest cat, Little Olive, reaches out to the Holy; she tumbles to the floor and stretches front paws reaching, reaching and rear paws stretching and then she arches an elongated rainbow. She looks up saying, "It's okay to rub my belly now." She is constantly on the move, tossing her body up and tumbling over everything abandoning dignity dashing, jumping, tossing, catching, clawing, purring. Olive expects the world to be a delightful place. Should I ask her? Can I expect the world to be exciting and delightful too? Can I ask her how to celebrate my body like she does hers?

The book of Job is a dark comedy-like reality show watching friends argue about God. The friends argue about God's relationship to creation, particularly to humanity. They argue about whether obedience brings meritorious blessings and disobedience punishments.

One conclusion of Job is in chapter 12 and Meister Eckhart later repeats the wisdom. Job, "Ask the animals, and they will teach you." Eckhart, "Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things. Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God." Can you agree with Meister Eckhart that time spent with a caterpillar's endless munching of leaves, humping crawl, silky cocoon, and rest in a sabbath of flesh-melting and reforming metamorphosis into a butterfly - can teach of God?

We are blessed by the furry, feathered and scaled animals we host in our homes, our pets. Those of us with pets get to study their lives closely. What do you ask them? What do you learn from them?

I HOPED FOR great intersection of Pets and Black Lives Matter. Instead I read about segregated Dog Parks and how dogs learn to be racist. How the pet industry sold almost a 100 billion in products in 2019. It was reported in the NAACP's 2018 Annual Report that they received 35 million in Support and Revenue. Imagine what could the NAACP do with 100 billion? O course we love our pets and I do not advocate less for them; but what if encouraged by Black Lives Matter advocates stretched and gave more millions to the NAACP and other organizations focused on justice for Black Lives.

I Hoped for a cute story about how our love of animals can be a tool against racism. JEANIA MOORE wrote in Sojourner's Magazine, Sept/October 2019 - WHEN RACISM PITS ANIMAL JUSTICE AGAINST BLACK HUMANITY: White supremacy teaches false, hierarchical models of creation limiting who is in the circle of care.

"Hurricane Katrina in 2005 was one of the worst environmental justice disasters in modern U.S. history. It was also one of the first times that I, then a teenager, consciously connected animal justice and racial justice. Kanye West's declaration "George Bush doesn't care about black people" is often remembered as the statement on racism in Katrina, but another expression that needed no words circulated among black people in the hurricane's immediate aftermath: a picture of pets being evacuated on an air-conditioned bus.

While black people were abandoned, dead, and dying on rooftops, corpses floating bloated in flooded streets, people's pets were evacuated to safety.

Black people have long understood as racist the disparate treatment of nonhuman animals and black people. In 1855, Frederick Douglass wrote that "The bond-woman lives as a slave, and is left to die as a beast; often with fewer attentions than are paid to a favorite horse."

I hoped for a story to tie blessing of the animals and Black Live Matter. Didn't find it. Let's make one.

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus is recorded saying, "For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.'"

Let's get to seismic moving, seismic mountain-sized moving in our culture finally. Let's write a new story about how our love of Creation finally intersected our need to love Black Lives, finally birthed a new realization of how we can love our pets, love all God's animals, love the greens and blues of nature and we can love all humanity especially blessing Black Lives for many generations in reparations.

Dostoyevsky appeals, "Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love." Amen.