

I grew up in a family that hunted. My grandfather—PopPop—my uncles, and even my mom. My dad, a veterinarian, wasn't much of a hunter.

How many of you have ever gone hunting? Hunting and gun safety (were a part of the my upbringing - and like most things, when its in your world view it can take awhile to realize that not everybody has the same experiences of the world as you) but anyway

Starting when I was four or five, PopPop would take me and my brother hunting with him, into the woods. We weren't old enough to shoot, but he brought us along mainly because for him, hunting was more about being in woods early in the morning than it was about anything else. He brought us along to watch, to learn. We'd walk—and, try to quietly tiptoe—through the woods and sit still beneath a tree.

And PopPop would say, *"If you're quiet and still, you will see all kinds of things, the forest will come alive."*

It's hard for kids to be still. But we learned a kind of reverent stillness. We watched how much my Poppop loved being in the woods and so we learned from an early age there is something special about being in nature. And about creation.

And I've come to realize how rare that is now. In a world of glowing screens, asphalt, and fast everything—*stillness* is countercultural.

Listening to creation is revolutionary. And it is spiritual.

It's interesting though because in this era where more and more people describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious," many say they feel most connected to the spiritual in nature. Even lifelong Christians often name that they feel *closest to God in nature*.

How many of you would say this is true for you?

I think it's because **creation doesn't argue with you**. It doesn't ask you to prove your worth. It doesn't shame you. It doesn't sell you something.

Instead, it welcomes you. It holds you. It reminds you that you belong. It slows you down. It slows down your nervous system... or at least it does mine.

With little kids who sometimes have lots of big emotions, when things feel like chaos... more and more I'm realizing that a helpful response is- let's go outside. Whether its let step outside and see if we see a squirrel in the yard, or Let's go for a walk down the road.

Yesterday morning Andrew did this exact thing... he ushered 3 little kids outside to play in the pouring rain...I was out running an errand and the neighbors a few doors down called me and said, just wanted you to make sure you knew your kids are out in the back yard and it's raining, just wanted to make sure you knew. I thanked her, and laughed to myself. Of course he knew, he probably encouraged it. I came home to Andrew standing outside in his rain jacket and the 3 little kids (who had complete stripped down to nothing by then) were soaking wet and grinning from ear to ear. Well at least the 3 kids were grinning.

I swear it changes us...being outside shifts the energy and creates a little more space to breath.

When we go on walks, my kids remind me how much I don't pay attention to all of the creatures, They are always pointing out creatures. And also little twigs. They love to stop and pick up all kinds of things on a walk, and show me just how impatient and in a rush I am.

Creation invites us to slow down, to listen, to be present—and in doing so, it *restores our sense of being held by something greater*.

Nature reveals a God who is *not only found in sanctuaries and sermons*, but in soil and sky. A God who is not bound by buildings.

I also think that creation reflects a kind of deeper knowing about who God is. Maybe that's what draws us to it...

As Job says, "Ask the animals, and they will teach you."

This week when I was reflecting on what to preach on, and thinking about our continued focus on earth day this Sunday I was reading the scripture in Job where he says to ask the animals they will teach you, I began to think about how Creation has so much to teach us about God...because creation reflects the creator.

Let me tell you what I mean.

When we talk about the food chain, we're describing how energy moves through creation—how life feeds life. It might sound cold or scientific at first glance: predator and prey, consumer and consumed. But look closer. There's a kind of *holy choreography* at play.

Every living thing exists *because* of something else. Every creature is part of a great exchange. The sun feeds the plants. The plants feed the herbivores. The herbivores feed the carnivores. And when creatures die, fungi and microbes break them down—returning them to the earth so the cycle can begin again.

This isn't just biology—it's theology. It's a pattern of **gift and return**, of **sacrifice and renewal**, of **interdependence** written into the fabric of the world

What does this teach us? That life is not meant to be self-sufficient. That we were never created for independence, but for **interdependence**. That in God's design, everything is connected, everything has a role, and nothing is wasted.

We are part of something much bigger—a web of life, held together by the Creator.

Take the vulture, for example. Often dismissed as ugly or unclean, the vulture performs a sacred service. It cleans up what has died, preventing the spread of disease. It turns decay into safety. Even in death, God provides a path toward healing.

As Job says: Ask the animals, and they will teach you.

Now I have a few more animal facts...so if you aren't a science or animal person just hear me out.

Did you know....

- **Clownfish:** All clownfish are born male. The most dominant one becomes female. When the female dies, the next in line *transitions sexes* to take her place. (*Talk about adaptive roles and fluid identities in community!*)
- **Wrasse fish:** A type of reef fish that also changes sex from female to male when needed, to maintain the group's reproductive balance.
- **Banana slugs:** These creatures are *hermaphrodites*—each has both male and female reproductive organs. When they mate, they often fertilize each other simultaneously. (*Reciprocity in reproduction!*)
- **Laysan albatross:** On the Hawaiian island of Oahu, scientists have found colonies where *female-female pairs* are raising chicks together. While they occasionally mate with males for reproduction, they form lifelong parenting partnerships with other females.

These examples challenge rigid human categories and reveal a Creator who delights in variety, What if we saw diversity in gender and relationships not as a threat, but as evidence of divine creativity?

These are not exceptions—they are reminders.

Reminders that God's creation is *more diverse, more adaptive, more fluid* than we often allow for in our doctrines or boxes.

If creation reflects the Creator, then our God must be wildly creative, beautifully nonbinary, and endlessly adaptive.

What might it mean for the church to *listen to the animals* here?

God's creatures are not just instinct-driven—they show signs of thought, grief, memory, and joy. Those of you who are horse people - horses can sense your emotions can't they...

- **Elephants:** Mourn their dead, visit the bones of lost herd members, and display signs of grief. (*What does this teach us about honoring life and loss?*)
- **Octopuses:** Each arm has its own "mini brain," and they can solve puzzles, open jars, and escape tanks. Their intelligence defies expectations.

The list goes on,

Service animals... dogs can alert someone to a seizure coming on, or a diabetic crisis.

Squirrels and **ants** store food, but only what they need—nature doesn't hoard.

The natural world teaches balance, not excess. Could it be that animals practice a kind of *Sabbath wisdom* we've forgotten?

So yes, Job was right.

"Ask the animals, and they will teach you."

Not just about nature—but about *God*.

Not just about survival—but about *life worth living*.

They remind us of resurrection, interdependence, identity, rhythm, and grace.

The Brokenness of Extraction

We've stopped asking and started taking.

Consumerism tells us: "More is better."

But when we stop listening—when we treat the earth not as teacher, but as resource—we break relationship.

- We cut down forests, poison rivers, and pollute skies.
- Climate change. Mass extinction. Rising seas.
- These are not just ecological crises. They are *spiritual crises*.

I could go in to all the ways creation is being exploited and extracted from, but my guess is you already know some of this...and two I can't say everything in one day. But as I was reflecting on the ways humanity is destroying and exploiting earth I also was reflecting on how

Creation is not just a passive backdrop to our lives—it is **alive**, dynamic, and wired with the capacity to *renew itself*.

When land is left to rest, native plants return. Animals find their way back. Soil heals.

Rivers begin to clear themselves once pollution stops flowing in.

Coral reefs, when protected and undisturbed, start to regrow.

The same God who designed our bodies to scab and scar, to mend and restore, also embedded that same wisdom into the earth.

This is not accidental. This is *grace written into the design of the world*.

Healing Begins When Harm Stops

What's more—creation doesn't require us to fix it.
Often, it simply requires us to *stop hurting it*.

During the COVID-19 shutdowns, we caught a glimpse of this:

- Carbon emissions dropped.
- Air and water quality improved.
- Wildlife roamed freely.
- The planet started to *breathe again*.

The earth knows how to heal—**if we let it**.

Creation's healing power is a reflection of the Healer who made it.
A reminder that restoration is possible. That resurrection isn't just a one-time event—it's woven into the soil, the seasons, the sea.

How Do We Respond?

Sometimes in the face of the massive environmental and climate crisis it can feel overwhelming and too big. We cannot fix everything. But we can *choose how we live*: Our everyday practices and habits reflect our spirituality our values.

We Can't fix everything but we can continue our work on our space to lead by example and show how our faith impacts how we are in community with each other and the land. I don't have the answers, but do think we can ask the animals, and the trees and the rivers. They are not silent. They're preaching resurrection, rhythm, humility, and belonging.

And if all of us are listening and asking the questions, I do believe that grace written into the design of the world. And that we can be renewed.