

## St. Francis Day Sermon

St. Francis was about many things, many of them as unpopular in his day as they are in ours, including renunciation of power and wealth, embrace of holy poverty and of poor people themselves, and wholehearted servanthood as a human being. He also knew something often forgotten or neglected which we especially celebrate today: *human beings are not the only species on earth which God loves.*

“And God saw that it was good” is a rhythmic refrain after each of the so-called “days” of the Creation in this afternoon’s reading from Genesis. Inherent goodness – and God’s approval – did not show up just when we human beings did. Sin and brokenness did, however, show up when we human beings showed up. The animals have always had God; only human beings needed and need a Savior.

One of the ways we human beings are called to give thanks to God for creating us, for offering us forgiveness and new life through Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit is through *how we exercise our “dominion” over the Creation* referred to in today’s reading from Genesis. God, after all, is and continues to be the *owner* of Creation; we are simply the “building superintendents,” so to speak. That is an important job – but it doesn’t mean we can do whatever we want. We are answerable to the owner – and to the other tenants of the planet.

We can all think of examples of human behavior towards our fellow tenants of this planet which was or is reprehensible. We acknowledge those grim realities, and pray for all who suffer as a result, whether because of cruelty to individual creatures or destruction of entire ecosystems.

But we also give thanks today for those who love, protect and delight in our fellow creatures in many ways, near and far. And I’d like to call attention to ways that those who come to this service are doing and can continue to do this.

For the past two years since the inception of this service at St. Barnabas, we have had and continue a tradition of having a special offering to benefit one or more ministries which help animals. In 2005, it all went to rescue efforts in the Gulf after Hurricane Katrina. Last year, it was split between continued efforts to shelter such homeless animals, specifically cats, and to install fans in the Edison Municipal Animal Shelter. (You can see the pictures of both after the service.)

This year, we also will help one project which is near and one which is far. The near one is supporting efforts to build new kennels for the Plainfield Area Humane Society. The “far” effort is in support of the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, which operates an *elephant orphanage* in Nairobi, Kenya.

Yes, you heard me right: an elephant orphanage. Elephants, alas, are still hunted by poachers who want their tusks for illegal sale for ivory trinkets. Elephants, however, do not have tusks until they are at least three years old, so that when poachers murder the mother, father and any older children, elephants under three years old are left alive, orphaned – and defenseless. Even lions will not attack a full-grown elephant – they aren't stupid, after all – but they will attack babies successfully.

So in Nairobi, as you can see in the photos on display after the service, there is an orphanage in which elephants are raised until they become adolescents and are ready to be released back into the wild, where they are adopted by extended family groups. (Elephants are *very* family-oriented, as Elda and I have seen on safari in the wild.) The Sheldrick Trust staff members also visit schools to teach children about elephants and instill in them the reality that elephants are part of their heritage as human beings and as Kenyans, in hopes that some day a generation will grow up in which no one can even imagine becoming a poacher.

Personally, I think St. Francis would think all this was pretty cool. Animals were created by God first and foremost *to be themselves*. For that to happen, all too often they need the help of human allies to permit them simply to be. To live.

Let us celebrate the many opportunities before us to be servants of God and good stewards of God's Creation. Our stewardship of Creation will be on our final exam.

“All things bright and beautiful,  
all creatures great and small,  
all things wise and wonderful  
the Lord God made them all.”

**The Rev. Francis A. Hubbard**  
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church  
Monmouth Junction, NJ  
October 7, 2007  
5:30 pm service, outdoors