



Theme: The Ark – God and the Animals
“Animal Variety and Beauty”

Jeff Huber, August 22-23, 2026, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

²⁵ God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was. – Genesis 1:25

SLIDE Animal Variety and Beauty

Today we begin a new series of sermons on God and the animals that we're calling, "The Ark." We are hoping to have some fun the next 4 weeks thinking about how we see God reflected in the animals that we find in creation, including humans. This is a major theme in the scriptures and sometimes we miss it and we forget how important animals are to not only our existence but to the purpose of creation. Over the years I have received several funny cartoons that illustrate this idea of God and the animals and one of the stories we are often fascinated by is Noah's ark. As kids we all find this to be a cute story about animals living together 2 by 2 on this large boat as the rain begins to fall and cover the earth. The story has some profound insights for us and there are a few of them I want us to think about today. But the story has also spawned many great cartoons that you all have sent me

over the years, like these two.

GRAPHIC Noah - The Woodpecker might have to go

GRAPHIC Beavers Woodpeckers and Termites get restless

These all point to an interesting question that many of us might have when it comes to not just animals but humans.

SLIDE Why did God create such variety?

Have you ever wondered what God was thinking when he created things like termites or fleas or mosquitoes? There are many animals that we find in creation that make a scratch our heads, because they are so unique and don't seem to fill a purpose. Today, we're going to seek to understand how that variety might lead to beauty as we wrestle with what God was doing in the story of creation. What's the point of all these different ways that people act and believe in the world? It's one thing to wonder about animals, but I do believe God has given us that variety to show us something that is true and profound and necessary for us in today's world.

We see lots of polarization in today's world and much anxiety about how different people are and how we might get along with different politics and religions and just about any other difference that we might find among people. What do we do with those differences? How might the variety of the animal Kingdom give us a picture of God and what God longs for us as people of faith, and really for all humans and the animal Kingdom. I'm going to start with one answer to this question that I believe and that we find in the scriptures.

SLIDE God loves variety.

We find this idea from the very beginning of the Bible, in the very first story, and then we find it in story after story throughout the scriptures. I would suggest to you that there is something about the variety that we see in the animal Kingdom and among humans which is essential for the creation that God set into motion from the beginning.

You may not be aware of this, but there are two creation stories in our Bible, Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. That shows us how God loves variety and that God longs to speak to us through many kinds of stories and using many different images.

We can get all worked up about whether those creation stories are literal or metaphors, but I'm not going to spend a lot of time on that because I think if we do that, we lose the main point which is that these stories tell us about God and about ourselves. If you want to look at them literally, that's fine but then you have some questions you must deal with. If you want to look at them as parables or stories, then we also have some questions we must wrestle with. Either way, there are several things we should recognize. Let's start with Genesis 1 and we'll use The Message version of the Bible.

BIBLE

²⁰⁻²³ God spoke: "Swarm, Ocean, with fish and all sea life!

Birds, fly through the sky over Earth!"

God created the huge whales,

all the swarm of life in the waters,

And every kind and species of flying birds.

God saw that it was good.

God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Ocean!

Birds, reproduce on Earth!"

It was evening, it was morning—

Day Five.

²⁴⁻²⁵ God spoke: "Earth, generate life! Every sort and kind:

cattle and reptiles and wild animals—all kinds."

And there it was:

wild animals of every kind,

Cattle of all kinds, every sort of reptile and bug.

God saw that it was good.

²⁶ God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make

them reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.”

BIBLE

³¹ God looked over everything he had made;
it was so good, so very good!
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Six.

SLIDE We are stewards of God’s variety.

Everything was very good and God creates variety with the fish and the birds and every kind of animal. It's interesting to note that in this story God creates everything else and then finishes it off with humans. If you read Genesis 2 carefully you will discover that God creates humans first and then plants, and then all the animals. Each story makes a profound point. The story in Genesis 1 is about God creating all this variety and then telling humans that we are responsible for it. The idea is that we have agency and we have a responsibility to the animal Kingdom and to all of creation. Not only do we get to name the animals, but we get to be stewards of this creation that God has set into motion.

SLIDE We are dependent on God’s variety.

Genesis 2 reminds us that we are dependent on God's variety. On the one hand, we have power over this creation, and on the other hand we are dependent upon the variety of this creation. From things as simple as needing a variety of foods for our bodies to survive, to the complexities of needing a variety of seasons and climates for the earth to sustain life. I was thinking about this when it came to another story which is a microcosm of this idea that we are both in charge and dependent on creation and even the animal Kingdom.

GRAPHIC

Barry the St. Bernard

In 1895, a remarkable tale of courage and compassion unfolded in the icy terrain of the Swiss Alps. Barry, a St. Bernard trained by the monks of the Great St. Bernard Hospice, became a beacon of hope for stranded travelers. On a fateful day, Barry found a mountaineer who had lost his way and collapsed from exhaustion. Guided by his instincts and training, Barry worked tirelessly to keep the man warm, barking to alert rescuers and staying by his side until help arrived.

Barry was more than a rescue dog; he was a lifeline for those facing the Alps' harsh conditions. Equipped with supplies and unmatched endurance, he braved snowstorms and treacherous terrain, saving dozens of lives during his service. Stories of his heroism spread far and wide, turning Barry into a legend and highlighting the vital role of rescue animals. His image, often depicted in photographs and paintings, became a universal symbol of bravery and selflessness.

This story captivated Europe and North America, inspiring admiration for rescue dogs and their handlers. Barry's work also brought attention to the ongoing efforts of the monks who trained such extraordinary animals to save lives in the unforgiving mountains. His legacy laid the foundation for the role of rescue dogs in modern emergency response efforts, proving the enduring bond between humans and animals.

Barry's tale reminds us of the power of courage and compassion, even in the most challenging circumstances. "Heroes come in many forms, but their heart and dedication make all the difference." His story also reminds me that for him to fulfill that role he had humans who raised him and fed him and cared for him and taught him compassion towards the humans that he would rescue. Some of that may have been innate and instinct, but there is no doubt that Barry being raised as a pup in a Hospice that took care of dying patients also shaped him. Barry was dependent on humans to raise him and then humans became

dependent on him when they needed rescue. That in many ways sums up why we have two very different stories of creation that are meant to be read together as one.

That variety leads to beauty as we learn that we are dependent on each other. I would argue that this paradox of variety that needs each other in the first stories of our Bible are critical for us in today's world as they remind us that we need more than one strong political party. We need more than one person in a relationship. Those first stories in our Bible make it clear that God created us for each other and to be in relationship with the animal Kingdom and with other humans and with God. Variety not only leads to an understanding of our interdependence, but it leads to strength. Paul writes about this in his letter to the people of Corinth, which was one of the most diverse cities in the Roman world in the first century.

BIBLE

¹² The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. ¹³ Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

¹⁴ Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

¹⁸ But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. ¹⁹ How strange a body would be if it had only one part! ²⁰ Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. ²¹ The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you."

The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

²² In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary.

We find this lived out in the animal Kingdom in profound ways as we see very different species that are dependent on each other. I found this story about spy hippo fascinating. It was on the BBC Animal Kingdom channel, and they designed an artificial hippo with video cameras in its eyes to hang out with regular hippos and find out what they did because we haven't been able to get that close to hippos in the wild as they are very aggressive animals. They even designed it to have ears that would wiggle because that's how hippos let you know they are relaxed. Hippos can be aggressive towards each other and even though they are herbivores and eat only vegetables, they have these massive tusks which sometimes cause injury to each other when they are fighting, and they sometimes rub up against sticks in the river. They have become dependent on another species to survive the bumps and bruises and scrapes in life. Let's take a look.

GRAPHIC Spy Hippo

VIDEO Hippos and Carps

I love this image of these large hippos being dependent on these small fish to survive. God gives us a picture in these animals about what it means to be dependent on others that are very different from ourselves. From the very beginning of creation, God wired the animal Kingdom of which humans are apart to be dependent on others.

GRAPHIC Range by David Epstein

One of the books I read this summer was titled *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World*. Many experts have argued that anyone who wants to develop a skill, play an instrument, or lead their field should start early, focus intensely, and rack up as many hours of deliberate practice as possible. If you dabble or delay, you'll never

catch up to the people who got a head start. But a closer look at research on the world's top performers, from professional athletes to Nobel laureates, shows that early specialization is the exception, not the rule.

Epstein examined the world's most successful athletes, artists, musicians, inventors, forecasters, and scientists. He discovered that in most fields—especially those that are complex and unpredictable—generalists, not specialists, are primed to excel. Generalists often find their path late, and they juggle many interests rather than focusing on one period they're also more creative, more agile, and able to make connections they're more specialized peers can't see. He makes a compelling case for actively cultivating inefficiency. Failing a test is the best way to learn. Frequent quitters end up with the most fulfilling careers. The most impactful inventors cross domains rather than deepen their knowledge in a single area. As experts silo themselves further while computers master more of the skills once reserved for highly focused humans, people who think broadly and embrace diverse experiences and perspectives will increasingly thrive.

He is in essence arguing for variety and for being willing to sometimes sit and simply enjoy life, as well as the willingness to make mistakes and recognize that we need to live with open arms rather than closed and focused hands. Yes, it's good to focus our energy and we all want physicians who know their field, but the point is that the broader we are willing to look at life, the more we will find joy because we don't live with blinders on.

This is especially important for many of you who are raising children and getting them focused on just one sport. They have found that people who focus on many sports actually are the ones who excel at one sport later in life. They also experience fewer injuries because of that thing we call cross training where they exercise different kinds of muscles. They also learned to play team sports as well as individual sports and recognize that we need each other to be our best. We

learned in the last series this powerful proverb from Proverbs 27.

BIBLE

¹⁷ As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.

We also know that we need other people or we go crazy. This is true throughout the animal Kingdom when it comes to mammals. Not only do they need each other to reproduce, they need each other to keep warm and to be better together. Different species are dependent on each other like the hippos and the carps and there are many other examples in the animal Kingdom. I was remembering that I was taught by a farmer in Iowa that you can't have just one donkey because they will go crazy.

GRAPHIC Donkeys

GRAPHIC The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt

The same is true of humans. I was Reminded this past week about a book I read a couple years ago. The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness is a March 2024 bestselling book by social psychologist Jonathan Haidt. It argues that a sharp rise in adolescent mental illness starting in the early 2010s stems from a shift from a **“play-based childhood” to a “phone-based childhood.”** It's an important reminder that while technology can be helpful at times, we were not born with a phone in our hand, and the creation story contains no mention of technology. In many ways, the story of the serpent in the garden who promises those first humans they can be like God if they would eat the fruit of knowledge is an important image for us to remember because God created us not to be anxious but to live with joy. I think of the words of Jesus in Matthew 6.

BIBLE

²⁶ Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? ²⁷ Can all your worries add a

single moment to your life?

The animal Kingdom is meant to be a reminder about how it is God longs for us to give our worries to him and not carry them as a burden. Jesus finishes that sermon about birds and lilies and worries with these words.

BIBLE

³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

³⁴ “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

There is amazing beauty in this idea of being interconnected and seeing God’s idea of beauty in the animal Kingdom. Job is a man who loses everything in the epic poem that we find in the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. Job is much like the odyssey that some of you have seen in movie theaters and that it was written as a poem to talk about what we do with the problem of evil and how we find meaning and purpose in life when things don't go the way we plan. The ultimate idea in the book is that God created everything and holds everything, and we can find purpose and meaning and beauty even when things don't go our way. Here’s what we read in Job 12.

BIBLE

⁷ “Just ask the animals, and they will teach you.

Ask the birds of the sky, and they will tell you.

⁸ Speak to the earth, and it will instruct you.

Let the fish in the sea speak to you.

BIBLE

¹⁰ For the life of every living thing is in his hand, and the breath of every human being.

The truth is that most animals live far fewer years than we do,

with some of them just living a season, yet God has a purpose and we see beauty in those creatures. If you never have had a chance to look at some of the most amazing creatures, I thought I would do that today as part of this message. These animals show us the magnificence of God.

GRAPHIC Knit Pink Fairy Armadillo

GRAPHIC Blobfish

GRAPHIC Holding Blobfish

GRAPHIC Hammer Headed Bat

GRAPHIC Hydroid Jellyfish

GRAPHIC Komondor Dog

GRAPHIC Peacock Spider

GRAPHIC Platypus

GRAPHIC Red Lipped Batfish

GRAPHIC Red Lipped Batfish STARE

GRAPHIC Pink Fairy Armadillo standing

GRAPHIC Pink Fairy Armadillo running

GRAPHIC Knit Pink Fairy Armadillo

I saved this last one because it's a knit version of the pink fairy armadillo and not real. It made me think about the funeral we had this weekend for Bev Tomberlin. Her dedication and commitment to our church was a gift that we will miss. I found myself going through some of our old church photos and I found this picture a Bev and a group of crafty ladies who were committed to making projects for our United Methodist women's bazaar every year of which all the proceeds went to missions. I was grateful I found a picture of her knitting in that group because I have this hat that I bought from her just a couple of years ago.

GRAPHIC Bev Tomberlin

GRAPHIC Crafty Ladies

GRAPHIC Bev knitting

My favorite story that I heard about Bev is one I had not heard before, but you can find it in the Book of Bev. She and Guy were some of the first to raft down the Animas River and they did so in a blue fishing boat with oars. Bev didn't swim very well but she and the kids and Guy were making their way down the river while she knitted to keep herself busy. They went through several rapids and finally hit a drop where everyone went out of the boat, including the kids and Bev. Since she couldn't swim, she found a place to stand up in the river and held up her knitting in the air over her head yelling, "Someone save my knitting." She didn't seem to be too concerned about Guy or the kids, but she wanted her knitting to be saved.

I appreciated that story because it just shows you how tough she was and how she did everything from knitting to rafting and was a woman of many talents. Most importantly, I appreciated her faith. The truth is that all of us go through rapids in life and the question I always ask is what you are holding on to. While Bev held on to her knitting, I know she also held onto her faith. It was why she insisted on being in worship every week even when her health was failing and she was carrying her oxygen. I still miss her sitting 3 rows back on the right side of the sanctuary with her group of friends who I know miss her dearly.

I also love this story because it really embodies this idea of variety where you have a woman who was a math teacher and whose family was a homesteader up in Idaho. She was one of the first women to go to college in her generation and she knit and she rafted and she experienced all the variety and beauty of life that we've talked about in this message.

I especially appreciated her love for birds. She fed the birds every morning at 5:45, doing everything she could to fight off the raccoons and the bears. She would go on trips to see birds and believe there was

no sacrifice too great to care for and see the birds. I remember once talking to her about that text in Matthew 6 we just read with Jesus talking about the importance of remembering the birds of the air and how God cares for them.

What I hope you might do this week is make a decision to pause and to consider the lilies and to watch the birds. Just take a moment to be still and be quiet and see if you could notice some of the animal Kingdom that God has placed in our care. Remember that we are meant to be people of variety and so we might try a number of things in life that are gifts from God to be able to experience God's grace and mercy. Maybe take a look at some of the different kinds of animals that we've looked at today or watch a National Geographic special. What I hope you will do when you do any of those things this week as a step towards God is that you might remember this memory verse and carry it with you and say it when you see a bird or some other beautiful animal or part of this wild Kingdom in which we live.

BIBLE

²⁵ God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was. – Genesis 1:25

Let's pray.

SLIDE Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the variety and beauty of your creation. Forgive us when we take it for granted and when we don't care for it in the way that you long for us to be good stewards. May we remember those first stories of the Bible which tell us about our place in the world, that we are meant to care for the world and we are dependent on the creatures that inhabit the world, including the other humans that are different from us but bring variety to your world. Give us patience to learn new ways and to see beauty and not just the animal Kingdom but the people that we need in our lives.

When we get worried or anxious, help us to remember the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. May we pause when we see simple things like flowers and birds and other parts of your creation because they remind us that you are with us. Help us to remember the words of genesis that remind us you made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, every kind of bird, every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. You made them and you made us and you saw how good it was. Thank you for that gift. In Jesus' name, amen.

August 22-23 Order

1. Countdown
2. Ryan welcomes people, inviting them to stand in body or spirit.
3. Song – “Holy Spirit Come”
4. Song – “Good, Good Father”
5. Jeff welcomes and shares:
 - A. QR Code
 - B. Connect Card and Spotify List
 - C. Invites people to greet each other
6. Announcement Video
7. Sermon Video Intro
8. Sermon
9. Med Moments
10. Offering (Backpack tags)
11. Song – “How Great Thou Art”
12. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
13. Care Ministers
14. The Bridge
15. All Church Picnic and River Baptism TODAY
16. Blessing of the Backpacks
17. Closing Prayer