

Sermon: In The Age of the Anthropocene**Scripture: Psalm 104****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: October 20, 2024**

It is said that we are in the geologic age of the Anthropocene, an age that is marked by the impact human activity has upon the earth - climate change, the effect of plastic pollution on life processes, the extinction of species, and changing chemical composition of the soils, ocean and atmosphere.¹ In this age we as humans are also becoming more aware of the interlinking webs of the material world that ties all things together. It's all so much more complex than the neat and tidy categories that we previously have used to make sense of the world, these firm lines separating us from nature, male from female, white from black, citizen from foreigner, but what we are learning is that it's all so much more complex than these binaries account for. Reality is much more crossed and blurred, intermingled and mixed, intersected and enmeshed than we can account for.

We were taught religiously of a clear hierarchy of consciousness with humanity up here near the gods and all the rest of nature mute and material that we could use for our purposes. Now we are learning about levels of consciousness we thought were exclusive to humans that are present in animals and tree communities and fungi. The lines are complexified and blurred... and beautiful. We were taught at one point that there was male and there was female and that was how God made it and planned it to be and now there is an awakening to the truth that two genders, clearly delineated, is far too simple and rigid to account for the

¹ Emergent Magazine Podcast, Bayo Akomolafe "When You Meet the Monster, Anoint its Feet", March 7, 2023.

deeper mystery of gender and there is male, female, nonbinary, transgender. The lines are complexified and blurred... and beautiful. We used to be able to say simply this is our land and not your land even when it was never ours to begin with but now the hard lines of nations and states are complexifying and blurring, people moving and migrating, boundaries becoming porous and building walls only serves to wound the land and divide ourselves from ourselves for the lines are complexified and blurring and realizing that we are all one people is beautiful.

And so on this Animal Blessing Sunday here in the 2020's at the relative beginning of the age of the Anthropocene, we celebrate the profound complexity of reality and specifically the natural world of which we are a part. I love how the Nigerian thinker and philosopher Bayo Acomolafe speaks of us as being not so much individual separate beings but in reality our identities are much better understood as territories. He says "the image of the human is being composted. We are experiencing great difficulty in determining where the nonhuman stops and the human begins. Everything touches everything else. An observation that is supported by current thinking about holobiomes, assemblages of bodies within bodies within bodies, intersecting communities that toss out notions of separable individuality. We are holobiomes, we live and are lived through, we are composite beings, companion species, emerging within and among assemblages."²

So where do we stop and our pets begin, our dogs, our cats, our animal companions? The lines are blurred and much more complex than we first imagine. When we think about ourselves and our identities, our animal companions are us and we are a part of them. If you've ever read

² Bayo Acomolafe in Emergent Magazine Podcast, @ 16 minutes

the Golden Compass series you'll know the image that is used - each person in that book has an animal companion called a Daemon that is intimately connected to their soul and spirit and it's a torture when they are cut off from them. If anyone has had a pet die you know the truth of this, they are much closer to us, actually, within us, a part of who we are more than simply companions alongside of us. right?

And even as science is discovering this interconnectedness of all things, bodies within bodies within bodies, we realize that traditional Christian theology has been naming this reality from the beginning, speaking in the words of Paul about Christ living within us and us in Christ, our identities being much deeper and broader than we usually acknowledge. And so we'll bless your animal companions this day with words of the Trinity, The Father Son and Holy Spirit, a web of loving companionship that we call GOD. And as we do this blessing we are blessing you and the earth and receiving blessing ourselves cause that's how blessing moves, in and out and all around.

May all of our lives be lived as a blessing out towards others especially in these days of anxiety and loneliness that we are living in and may we remember that republicans and democrats, documented citizens and undocumented, humans and nonhumans alike are all a part of God's blessed complex world... or another way of saying it is that we all have a place in God's choir, all of us critters and even the materiality of the earth is a part of God's choir, the wind sings through the branches of trees and the rocks have their part and soil holds it all to itself as the remarkable chorus of life sings its praise and for this we are grateful so let's sing together - all God's critters got a place in the choir!

