

Gospel lesson

Although the psalm and epistle lessons are from the lectionary for today, I chose alternate readings that mention animals for the Old Testament and Gospel lessons. Hear now these words of Jesus:



picture from personal photo

Matthew 6:25-33

(NRSV)

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,

²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’

³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn “All Things Bright and Beautiful” UMH #147>

Message: Armored



background picture from
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armadillo>

Please pray with me?

Almighty protector,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,

- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we look first to our Creator and Redeemer in all things, as you teach us through animals. Amen.



Coinciding with our Blessing of the Animals, the “Geared Up for Life” series concludes today with, “Armored.” For that summary:

“Accessorizing – that’s the image from the preaching notes that we might work with this week. The author of Ephesians wants us to realize that we are not left without resources as we seek to be made into disciples and to make disciples.

In a way, this is the gear we have been “gearing up for life” throughout the series. So, what are these tools and how do we employ them in our daily lives?”

Our Bible stories today show how we worry and struggle while trusting our own devices:

- † Balaam was frustrated with his donkey not going the way he wanted to go, so he lashed out (literally) at the poor creature.
- † Jesus pointed out the worries of people focused on material things – what to eat, what to wear –

instead of trusting God.

- † Ephesians describes our struggle against “cosmic powers of ... darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil.” Mere humans by themselves cannot prevail against something so much greater!

And we continue with those very same behaviors today.

- † When stressed, we all-too-often lash out at those trying to help us.
- † We get caught up in seeking things instead of God.
- † We are overwhelmed with the scale of problems in the world – the pandemic, Afghanistan, natural catastrophes.

But we are taught that God blesses and protects us, much like the animals with which we are also blessed and protected. Paul talks about different types of armor, and we see similar features in the animal kingdom:

- † Belt of truth – Often it can be hard to discern the truth, so we must take care to seek for it.



pictures from
<https://www.technocrazed.com/top-23-spectacular-examples-of-animal-camouflage-photo-gallery>

Animals often use camouflage to hide from danger. We may have to look closely to see the animal

before us and appreciate its beauty, much like the truth we learn from scripture

- † Breastplate of righteousness – covering the chest, a breastplate offers protection of our heart and lungs. In scripture, the same word is used for wind and spirit; it can represent our souls. The heart and lungs, therefore, represent the core of who we truly are. The love of God is the best protection for us, so we look to God to cover our hearts and souls with it.



picture screencaptured from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMe-5FiVpeM>

Apes beat their chests to communicate with one another, often avoiding combat because of it. When we communicate God's love to one another instead of simply lashing out, we avoid many conflicts.

- † Shoes – Paul said these should be “whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.” Animals have feet, claws and paws that enable them to do many things.



Leopard photo from <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/Leopard-climbing-down-tree-on-african-savannah-nick-dale.html>, goat screencapture from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0jMzdbEui0>, duck picture from personal photo

Large cats have claws that enable them to climb just about anything, able to spring upon their prey (that definitely gets their prey's attention!). How carefully do we prepare to talk about Jesus with someone?

Mountain goats have hooves enabling them to traverse the steepest slopes, getting to places most creatures consider unattainable. Where can you reach someone with the Gospel that no one else can?

Webbed feet of many waterfowl enable them to swim and walk on land, in addition to their ability to fly. How many different places do our shoes take us, that we may proclaim the Gospel?

- † Shield of faith – this protects us from the flaming arrows of the evil one.



SHIELD of FAITH

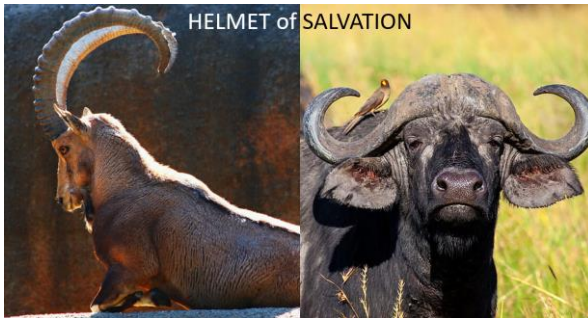
pictures from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armadillo>
and
<https://twitter.com/wildlifenj/status/885212298759069697>

Armadillos have plates that serve as shields around their bodies, and turtles & tortoises have thick shells. These deflect missiles from them, protecting them from injury; there are even stories of bullets ricocheting off of armadillo plates.

When we hold fast to faith in God, this helps us deflect some of the cruel things people say and do

toward us, helps us persevere in the face of “Why ME?” questions that come up.

- † Helmet of salvation – this is knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that He died for our sins and came again that we may have eternal life.



pictures from <https://modernfarmer.com/2014/08/10-best-horns-animal-world-definitive-list/> and <https://www.pigsels.com/en/public-domain-photo-jzuuf>

Animals have horns to defend themselves against predators, to establish who is in charge, and even for temperature regulation. By studying about Jesus, we defend ourselves against those who would take advantage of us, we determine who we look to for leadership, and we gain peace that keeps us more even-tempered.

- † Sword of the Spirit – Paul calls the Word of God this.



cheetah picture by [Chris Parker](#) from South Ealing, UK - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/seenbychris/48974093898/>; dog photo from <https://www.petmd.com/dog/general-health/5-scary-consequences-neglecting-your-dogs-teeth>; and crocodiles photo from photo from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Crocodiles_resting_together.jpeg

Many animals have teeth, used to help the animals defend their territory and to consume what they

need to survive. Some use their teeth to carry things for those they care about.

Words out of our mouths can hurt others or can help sustain their souls. When we use the Word of God to guide our speech, we drive away evil and protect the good we care about. Wielding the sword of the Spirit is speaking in love with others as Jesus would have us do.

Yet just as teeth can hurt, so too can the sword of the Spirit when we confront hatred or injustice, driving for God's good instead. We need to be careful in those cases not to rend other people, just the actions and systems that sustain evil.

Perhaps that is why Paul wrote about the helmet of salvation in the same sentence as the sword of the Spirit: so that we would be guided by the love of Jesus during our most challenging encounters.

And so we see in the variety of animals and their abilities that God gave them what they need to live well. Some of them even protect us, as Balaam's donkey did, and as our pets often do.



Let us celebrate now the animals which bless our lives and serve as an example to us of some ways in which we too can better live for God.

RESPONSIVE PRAYER¹

God created us and placed us on the earth to be stewards of all living things, therefore let us proclaim the glory of our Creator, saying:

0 God, how wonderful are the works of your hands.

Blessed are you, 0 Lord of the Universe; you create the animals and give us the ability to train them to help us in our work.

0 God, how wonderful are the works of your hands.

Blessed are you, 0 Lord of the Universe; you give us food from animals to replenish our energies.

0 God, how wonderful are the works of your hands.

Blessed are you, 0 Lord of the Universe; for the sake of our comfort you give us domestic animals as companions.

0 God, how wonderful are the works of your hands.

Blessed are you, 0 Lord of the Universe; you care for us, even as you care for the birds of the air.

0 God, how wonderful are the works of your hands.

¹ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-service-for-the-blessing-of-animals>

Blessed are you, O Lord of the Universe; you offered your Son to us as the passover lamb and in him willed that we should be called your children.

**O God, how wonderful are the works of your hands.
Amen.**

Introduction and Blessing of Each Animal²

Bless, O Lord, this (these) creature(s), and fill our hearts with thanksgiving for its (their) being.

<Doxology>

<Prayer of Dedication and Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

God of power and might: Through the ages, you have reminded us through prophets and apostles that we are called to battle – not with one another, but against the powers of darkness and evil.

It is this battle that sends children to bed with empty bellies, while others have so much food it damages their health.

It is the battle that imprisons those whose only crime is poverty, while those with more than they could ever spend lose sleep scheming how to get more.

As we make our gifts to you this day, may we remember on which side we're on.

Use our gifts and guide us with Your wisdom in our daily lives.

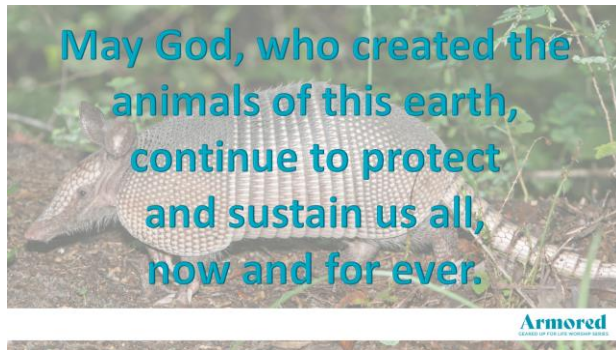
² <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-service-for-the-blessing-of-animals>

- Help us, Lord, with healing touch and comfort for:
 - Those who have lost pets -
 - Family of Rev. Ken Landall - died Aug 9
 - Lonnie Hakes - gallbladder attack
 - -
 - -
 - -
 - Afghanistan - especially women and military veterans
 - Places devastated by fires - US, Canada, Siberia, Mediterranean; downwind air quality
- Thanks for
 - -
 - -
- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
 - Family far off
 - Travelers
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
 - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
 - bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders - local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.

All these things we pray as You taught us to pray,
<Lord's Prayer>

<Hymn "Now Thank We ALL Our God" UMH #102>

<Benediction>³



background picture from
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armadillo>

*Go now, geared up and armored for life in Christ.
May God, who created the animals of this earth,
continue to protect and sustain us all,
now and for ever. Amen.*

³ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-service-for-the-blessing-of-animals>

"All God's Creatures Got A Place In the Choir" was composed by Bill Staines, an American folk musician and singer-songwriter from New England.

Chorus:

All God's critters got a place in the choir
Some sing low, some sing higher,
Some sing out loud on the telephone wire,
And some just clap their hands, or paws, or anything they got now

(Repeat chorus)

Listen to the bass, it's the one on the bottom
Where the bullfrog croaks and the hippopotamus
Moans and groans with a big to-do
And the old cow just goes moo.
The dogs and the cats, they take up the middle
While the honeybee hums and the cricket fiddles,
The donkey brays and the pony neighs
And the old grey badger sighs.

(Chorus)

Listen to the top where the little bird's singin'
On the melodies with the high notes ringing,
The hoot owl cries over everything
And the blackbird disagrees.
Singin' in the nighttime, singing in the day,
The little duck quacks, then he's on his way.
The otter hasn't got much to say
And the porcupine talks to himself.

(Chorus)

It's a simple song of living sung everywhere
By the ox and the fox and the grizzly bear,
The grumpy alligator the hawk above,
The sly ol' weasel and the turtle dove.

(Chorus)

(Repeat chorus)