**1ST READING: 'THOUGHTS ON A COLLECTION OF BIBLE PASSAGES'**

(Genesis 1 v l & 31, Ch 2 v 19-20, Ch 9 v 12-16, Isaiah 11 v 9, John 1 v 1-3)*(Presented with seven children, holding up large photos of creatures mentioned in bold.)*

*"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth",* says the first verse of the Bible. Then God created the **sea creatures**, the **birds** and the **animals**. Finally, God created mankind to be in, *"His own image"*, and, *"He saw all that He had made and it was very good."*

Animals must have been very important to God for He gave them into the *care* of His supreme creation - us - and He directed humankind to name them, giving them an identity, a unique and lasting value.

But we, as humans, did not fulfil all of God's hopes for us and we soon *fell* into temptation. Nonetheless, God made a promise to Noah, to us, and to His creatures: *"I will remember my covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh."*

Through Isaiah, God tells us that when by Jesus, His love reigns all over the earth, then the *whole* creation will live as God first planned, in perfect Peace and harmony: *"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."* And *we* have a responsibility to help create this Peaceable kingdom.

~~~~Pause~~~~

*"In the beginning was the Word* (Jesus)*, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made".* This is how the disciple John describes Jesus: Jesus, the Word, was Himself part of the wonder of Creation.

Throughout Jesus' ministry animals played their part. They were at His birth in a **stable *(cow)***; they were at His Baptism as a **dove**; they were with Him in the wilderness as **wild animals**, and they **carried** ***(donkey)*** Him on His journey to Jerusalem - where He was crucified.

**2ND READING: 'THOUGHTS ON A FURTHER COLLECTION OF BIBLE PASSAGES'**

(Luke 12 v 6, Matt 23 v 37, John 10 v 14-15, Colossians 1 v 19-20, Revelation 5 v 13-14)

We often recall how Jesus spoke of God's love for every single sparrow; but we do not always remember the sorrow of Jesus in His words: *". . . how many times I wanted to put my arms around your people, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me!"*

We think of Jesus as the Lamb of God or as the Good Shepherd who promised He would lay down His life for His sheep, every one of whom He knows by name.

Jesus kept this promise for His *whole* creation. As the apostle Paul wrote: *"For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him* (Christ)*, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making Peace through His blood, shed on the Cross."*

~~~~Pause~~~~

And now, all of us here in . . . . . Church, people *and* animals, are sharing in today's worship, and we are reminded of the beautiful picture we are given at the end of the Bible where the *whole* creation is sharing in heavenly worship, as John says:-

*"Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb* (Jesus) *be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!'*

*The four living creatures* (representing creation) *said, 'Amen', and the elders* (representing the church) *fell down and worshipped."* AMEN