



## Ask The Beasts: Darwin And The God Of Love

*With Elizabeth Johnson's book as our guide we will explore and deepen our understanding of God's love by looking to the beasts, birds, plants, and fish.*

**Chapter two - When We Look...**

**Dianna Ullery**

A child's  
world is fresh  
and new and  
beautiful,  
full of wonder  
and  
excitement.

*~ Rachel Carson*

The term “naturalist” describes Charles Darwin in the most complete sense. Certainly he was a scientist as well, but first and foremost he was a naturalist. The term doesn't mean much today, though. A naturalist might be someone who really likes nature, possibly someone who actually has a job liking nature. In Darwin's day a person could be a naturalist and people understood it meant someone who observed, noted and tried to make connections between those observations and the divine presence in the world. A naturalist was someone who could experience the divine through an overwhelming curiosity about and intimacy with nature.

I don't know what term we use today to describe the observer, note-taker, connection-maker type of person. I worked for many years as a “naturalist” in Ohio, but when I moved to Washington State I quickly learned that the term was not descriptive of my previous work. I was informed that here, “everyone is a naturalist.” I believe that was intended to mean that people out here are outdoorsy and interested in nature. That part is true, but I haven't met that many observer, note-taker, connection-maker types.

The role of Darwin as naturalist that most people seem to miss is how hard he worked to make the connections between his observations and the divine creative process. His observations did not cause him to doubt God's existence. He may have developed doubts about the theology of the day, but he recognized the experience of knowing God's presence in the natural world. The either/or, neither/nor simplistic interpretation of Darwin's life work only reveals the lack of understanding, imagination, and faith in those who eagerly oversimplify and villainize his ideas.

Darwin experienced the sense of wonder that Rachel Carson so beautifully described as she related the exquisite pleasures of sound, sight, and smell in opening the world to our curiosity. She wrote,

*“A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the source of our strength.” - A Sense of Wonder*

If we, as people of God, were able to maintain our own “sense of wonder”, our own ability to think and feel like a naturalist, how would it change our faith? Might we be able to embrace an understanding of creation as a process rather than an event? Could we use our inner naturalist to connect and reconnect with the source of our strength?

If you'd like to know more about Darwin check out the Smithsonian's excellent articles commemorating his 200th birthday. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/what-darwin-didnt-know-45637001/>

