



## 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 three - When Endless Forms Most Beautiful

Marie Benner-Rhoades

Thoughts on reading chapter 3 during this week in my life, as a new farmer and new parent:

#### Monday:

I started reading this chapter after a good, long day of farming - really more like triaging a garden that has seen more wet, cold weather this spring than any other I can remember. All of our "hot crops" are slow in growing, mostly due, we hope, to the low evening temperatures. When picking tomatoes to plant this year, we chose our favorites to eat: Yellow Brandywine - for the sweet taste that goes perfect on a summer pizza, Striped Cavern - for stuffing, Jet Star - for canning, Green Zebra - for its low acid, Sungold Cherry Tomatoe s- for a pop in your mouth snack, and one that we're calling "Mom's Paste" because the seeds have been saved by my husband's mother from one season to the next long enough that we don't remember the originating variety. - for making sauce, just to name a few. We could have selected them for their resistance to diseases and their ability to withstand extremes in temperatures. New varieties of tomatoes in the seed catalogs included a blight resistant variety and large Sungolds that don't split (a common problem if you don't harvest each day). So I had to smile when I read that Darwin knew that trait selection was possible by watching farmers choose their seed. I guess we'll see how we did with our choices later this summer!

#### Wednesday:

Natural selection is something I think of every time I pull weeds, how did these things become so resilient! As the crops struggle to take root and grow, the weeds are taking full advantage of the soil additions (nitrogen) and water that we're giving the young plants. My arch nemesis of the summer- bindweed! This hardy vine entangles everything making it difficult to pull without harming the crops. Its roots spread throughout the soil. And to make things worse, it's somehow become a favorite flower of my mother! Bindweed is a variety of morning glory- how did this sneaky weed make its way into seed packaging! A quick Internet search tells me there are about 250 species in the genus Convolvulus which is in the bindweed/ morning glory family, Convolvulaceae, which includes over 60 genera and 1650 species! And I'm sure each new generation is getting more resilient and, if my experience is true, harder to pull.

"There is  
grandeur in  
this view of  
life, with its  
several  
powers,  
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or into one..."

~ Charles Darwin

**Friday:**

In addition to reading *Ask the Beasts*, this week we've been reading *Horton Hatches An Egg* to our 6 month old daughter. There is nothing like a new baby to make you wonder in awe at the traits passed on from one generation to another, we see my mother and my husband's brother in her expressions. Last year at this time, we were looking at ultrasound pictures of a little creature growing inside of me. We were pretty sure we'd have a human baby, but looking at those early pictures one could have questioned that, perhaps we were having an elephant-bird!

**Sunday:**

So what does all this have to do with theology and faith? With all the explanations before me from Darwin and since, I can't help but work in a field or look at my daughter without pausing to give thanks to God for the beauty and complexity around me (even that darned bindweed with its dark green leaves and trumpet-ing flowers). That we are invited to be a part of caring for this creation, in both tending growth and producing adaptations that sustain life, is a gift from the Divine Creator.

**Questions for Discussion:**

*What "endless forms most beautiful" cause you to turn your attention from ordinary tasks of the week to the creative power of God? If we all have a common history and are related, what does stewardship of the Earth and care for creation look like? Darwin is quoted, "There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one..." (99/490), according to your understanding, does this limit or expand the ability God has to influence creation?*

**Will you be at Annual Conference in Columbus Ohio this week? Meet us at the Open Table booth for an in-person book chat about chapter 3, Friday afternoon at 1:30 in the exhibit hall. Hope to see you there! You can also enter for a chance to win a copy of the book!**

