



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 six - Free, Empowered Creation
Elizabeth Ullery & Kimberly Koczan-Flory

"Go, have an
adventure,
see what
you can
become.
And I will
be with you
every step
of the way"

This has been a tough week. The news around the world is not only heartbreaking, but disheartening. Enough so that upon hearing about a drive-by-shooting in front of the gay bar in my quiet town late last night, after four people had already been plowed down by a careless driver earlier this week, I was in need of some good news. I wandered the internet until I found my way to [Huffington Post's Good News blog](#), a stream of articles with heart-warming endings that remind us of the good in the world. After browsing the [birthday celebrations for a 66 year old manatee](#), and a video of a [puppy teaching his baby friend how to share](#), I had regained enough hope in humanity to pick up my book and read chapter 6. With the steady stream of bad news this week heavy on my mind I soon found myself struggling with this chapter in a particularly strong way. The idea that by simply being created by God we are imbued with our own free integrity as a manifestation of God's own creating power and love, in a week where that free integrity has been used to harm so many other people is a hard dissonance to hold.

On the one hand I am awed to be a worldly example of God's love and expression of divine creativity. Being imbued with free integrity as a gift from God honors our gifts and affirms our call and yet other people, also expressions of God's divine creativity, have pushed the bounds of the mature loved modeled by God and caused so much hurt in this world. I can't believe these God-made people are genetic mutations gone awry and yet I struggling for another explanation. This theological perspective is much easier to apply to tree frogs or tulips that evolve over time in response to the natural surroundings than people who seem to evolve much more quickly (or maybe much more slowly).

As we sit in church it is easy to see those around us as manifestations of God's mature and divine love, surely the woman who prepares communion is a living reminder of God's divine love. We do not question God's love when we see a child explore the intricate creation with divine wonder and newness. So what changes when we draw clear conclusions of who is "right" and who is "wrong" in places of conflict? How can we be living manifestations of God's divine love and yet sit idly by as conflict ravages so many people around the world or even in our own homes?

I realize I am asking questions with no answers, and certainly no answers that I can provide. I know too that it is our human nature to shy away from questions that

cannot be answered with neat packages and comforting bows, so I know I push the edges of our collective comfort zones. Though maybe that is also part of our divine creation, a need to push beyond the comfortable and to reach out as manifestations of love to see the divine in those around us. We have been created as wordily examples of God's love and expressions of divine creativity.

"God's own honor is at stake in humans flourishing, to the point where whenever human beings are violates or their life is drained away, divine glory is dimmed; whenever human beings are quickened to fuller and richer life, divine glory is enhanced. Tying the glory of God so closely to the human well-being expresses a precise understanding of the love of the creating, redeeming Mystery as generous, generative, seeking the good of the beloved and having a stake in it."

Questions for Reflection:

- Reflect on a relationship you have had that has built up personal autonomy 'with a love that brings about flourishing' and promotes you to be your fullest self. (p. 159) How does relating to God in a similar way resonate with you as you take initiative in your unfolding future? What difference does this primary-secondary type of paradigm make to how you live life, live in community and pray?
- In our week of bad news, what have you found to celebrate? Where do you see good news being shared?

