

August 12, 2018

Animals of the Bible: The Ostrich

First Reading ~ *Job 39:13-18*

The wings of the ostrich flutter joyfully
with elegant plumes and feathers.
Yet it lays its eggs on open ground,
 to be warmed there in the sand,
unmindful that a foot could smash them,
 or that a wild beast may trample them.
 It treats its young cruelly
 and virtually disowns them;
 For God has deprived it of wisdom
and given it no share of common sense.
 Yet if challenged to a test of speed,
it puts dust between the horse and its rider.

Second Reading ~ *from Richard Rohr in “God’s Longest Speech”*

The longest single soliloquy attributed to God in the Bible is at the end of the Book of Job (Chapters 38-41), where YHWH asserts mystery and magnificence to the glib and falsely-assured advisers to Job. It is not just the length and the poetry of YHWH’s words that strike me, but the nature and animal metaphors that are presented as God’s precise “selling points” that both touch and inspire me. The text ends up being a praise of creation as something that humans can never fully appreciate or understand, but which forever stands as an affront to our knowledge, control, arrogance, and certitude.

If I read the first part of the speech correctly (38-39), YHWH names at least 23 elements of creation, and 16 different animal species as signs of God’s benevolence, love, and unresolvable mystery. There is almost no mention of human qualities or creativity except where it says “the children of God chanted praise in chorus” for all of this creation (38:7). Both nature and animals are presented as necessary mystery, humiliation, and foil to all human arrogance and superiority, and as God’s multiform self-revelation besides.

The text seems to say the world is created for our education, enlightenment, wonderment, stewardship and care. Earth itself, the stars, the sea, the mist, clouds, dawn, light, depths, abyss, the underworld, lightening, rain, grass, dew, snow, ice, frost, three constellations (which most Christians consider a pagan idea!), soil, mud, and the salt plains are all mentioned as an assault on human understanding. It’s a very humbling text, one in which YHWH seems to put humanity in its place.