

## **“God of the Sparrow, God of the Snail”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts  
June 25, 2023 - Fourth Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 7

[Genesis 7:21-18-21; Matthew 10:24-39](#)

We have a new quarantine. Perhaps you've heard this news. In Florida's Broward County, a three-square-mile area has been ordered to keep inside...its snails. An invasive species of the mollusks, eight-inch-long giant African land snails, have been found roaming the streets of a community there, with a population in the wild growing likely after people's pet snails escaped (very slowly). As these slimy specimens can cause great harm to agriculture, as they eat over 500 kinds of plants; buildings and other structures, as they happily dine on plaster and stucco; and even people, as they harbor rat lungworm, which causes meningitis, officials have asked for residents to notify the authorities should one of the slimy monsters be spotted so that they could be captured by a properly-prepared patrol of snail snatchers and their snail-sniffing canine. People living in the quarantine zone are also prohibited from transporting certain plants, soil, compost, or yard debris that could contain snails or their eggs while a pesticide broadcast in the area that keeps the creatures from producing their slime does its work, slowly eliminating the problem snails...for now -- agriculture management officials in Florida have battled against the snails a few other times over the last several decades, and will likely have to go to war against the creatures again in the future. These snails, it seems, and for good reasons, just can't get any respect!

At least God loves them. As we heard in our gospel lesson from Matthew, God's eye is on the seemingly insignificant creatures like the sparrows, and those even less esteemed or reviled, like giant African land snails. God, who made this good world and its diverse array of beautiful creatures loves all of creation.

One of our great problems as people is that we do not view the world and its creatures with the same concern as God does. Our concern is more selective and we value some creatures more highly than others. One of the greatest sins of people across time is that we do the same with human creatures, considering some to be good, beautiful, and esteemed and others to be insignificant, unlovable, or untouchable.

Our inclination to view and value different people and groups of people differently has led us to all sorts of evil and destructive behavior. In our first lesson from the book of Genesis, we read of an episode in which some of these behaviors are on full display. Following last Sunday's story about laughing Sarah being promised by God in her old age that she would have a child, we read in this week's story about a time after her child, Isaac, was born and playing with his step-brother Ishmael, who, like Isaac, was Abraham's child, being born earlier from Hagar, who was Sarah's slave. Sarah, perhaps moved by jealousy and fear, and certainly moved by a sense that she and her child mattered more than her slave Hagar and her child, she sought to cast out of her household these lowly rivals, who Abraham then dove out into the wild desert with nothing more than some bread and water, but also with a promise from God that God would care for them...and God did.

We see some biblical family values here, but other than trusting in God, our good and loving Parent, they are not biblical family values that we should emulate. These family values are pretty rotten, just like a lot of other family values too often called "biblical," with some individuals having power over others and using that power to cause harm. The hierarchies we see here and throughout the Bible do not demonstrate God's design for us, but rather show us that even in our brokenness, and even when we and our human systems and families demonstrate some of the worst behavior, God is still with us and cares for us. God cares especially for those who are uncared for by others -- those who are enslaved, used, abused, cast out, abandoned, and forgotten.

If we could follow in the way of our loving, caring heavenly Parent, and embrace that biblical value in our own families and in all of our dealings with other people, we would be blessed and the world would be blessed. If only we could be as concerned about the fate of the hundreds of poor and lowly migrants who sailed across the sea in desperation only to end up in a watery grave as we are about the few wealthy adventurers who lost their lives in a dangerous joy ride in an experimental submersible craft. Perhaps, if we cannot be fatigued by unending scenes of the world's people in great need, we would care as God cares and be moved to use our resources with greater urgency to work towards the creation of the world that God envisions for us -- a world where people seek for the well-being of all their neighbors as well as for themselves. We would be willing to

disturb the order of things, to disrupt the serene peace of the status quo, to create something better for all, a world full of shalom peace, in which all may experience wholeness and well-being.

This, true peace, is what the God of the sparrows, the God of the whales, the God of the salamanders, and the God of the snails desires for each of us and for the world we share. Let us work towards the creation of that world today. Amen.