

## **Bigger Fish to Fry: Fish as Indicator Species in the Old Testament**

**A Sermon for Two Voices** by Patty Friesen (July 14/19)

(Call to Worship: Psalm 8)

Voice 1: God creates fish. Genesis 1:20-23 And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

Voice 2: Ancient statues show the created order with birds at the top, animals and plants in the middle and fish on the bottom. Creation is a three-tiered order that is full of beauty and food at every level.

Voice 1: Job 12:7-13: "Ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know. that the hand of the Lord has done this? In the Creator's hand is the life of every living thing. and the breath of every human being."

Voice 2: The Creator creates humanity in the *likeness* of the Creator to care for creation, to use it for food and to always give thanks to the Creator for it.

Voice 1: 1 Kings 4:29-34 God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment, and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else; his fame spread throughout all the surrounding nations. He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish.

Voice 2: Fish as Indicator Species in Creation: The well-being of humanity is tied to the well-being of fish: If things are not going well with fish, things are not going well for people...Exodus 7:14-18 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; stand by at the river bank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake. Say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, "Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness." But until now you have not listened. Thus says the Lord, "By this you shall know that I am the Lord." See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall be turned to blood. The fish in the river shall die, the river itself shall stink, and the Egyptians shall be unable to drink water from the Nile.'"

Voice 1: Isaiah 19:5-8 The waters of the Nile will be dried up, and the river will be parched and dry; its canals will become foul, and the branches of Egypt's Nile will diminish and dry up, reeds and rushes will rot away. There will be bare places by the Nile, on the brink of the Nile; and all that is sown by the Nile will dry up, be driven away, and be no more. Those who fish will mourn; all who cast hooks in the Nile will lament, and those who spread nets on the water will languish.

Voice 2: God provides salvation from Pharaoh and leads the people out of Egypt into the wilderness and provided for them there but the people quickly forgot their Creator and Deliverer. Deuteronomy 4:15-20 Since you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure—the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, 18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them, things that the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven. But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron-smelter, out of Egypt, to become a people of God's very own possession, as you are now.

Voice 1: Numbers 11:1-6, 21-23: The rabble among the Israelites had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at." But Moses said, "The people I am with number six hundred thousand on foot; and you say, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month'! Are there enough flocks and herds to slaughter for them? Are there enough fish in the sea to catch for them?" The Lord said to Moses, "Is the Lord's power limited?"

Voice 2: When the people suffer, the whole created order including fish suffer. Hosea 4:1-3 Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel; for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing.

Voice 1: Christian Century, June 5, 2019. A whale that washed up on a beach in the Philippines recently was found to have 88 pounds of plastic in its stomach. That event encapsulates a planetary crisis: the earth's magnificent creatures including the very Leviathan that God enjoy watching sport in the sea in Psalm 104:28 are being destroyed by human recklessness.

Voice 2: As wetlands are drained, forests are cleared, water is polluted and oceans are overfished, animal and plant habitats shrink. Climate change puts additional stress on species, making it even harder for plants and animals to adapt. And the loss of insects, amphibians, fish, birds, wildlife and the habitats they depend on will inevitably make human life more precarious.

Voice 1: Protecting the invaluable contributions of nature to people will be the defining challenge for decades to come, said British scientist Robert Watson, chair of the international panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystems. Watson and colleagues appeal to people to recognize the invaluable contribution the diversity of creation makes to human life.

Voice 2: But this instrumental view of nature is itself at the heart of the crisis. It stands in contrast with the vision of creation found in the Bible, where the diversity of plants and animals is not simply useful for humans; it is good in itself, a feature of creation that commands respect and wonder.

Voice 1: God desires to save us from ourselves and save the fish. Jonah 1:17, 2:1,10. The Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish. Then the Lord spoke to the fish and it spewed Jonah out upon the land.

Voice 2: When the Creator restores creation, there will be an abundance of fresh, living water full of fish. Ezekiel 47:9-10 9 Wherever the river of life flows, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes. People will stand fishing beside the sea; it will be a place for the spreading of nets; its fish will be of a great many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea.

Voices 1&2: Let all creation praise the Lord, the sea creatures, fish, wild animals, humans, creeping things and flying birds. Let them all praise our Creator, Deliverer and Sustainer. Amen.