

## GOD OF DINOSAURS

In celebration of Earth Day, which was last Thursday, I'd like to share with you my love of the Mesozoic Era, and primarily of the creatures that called Earth home long, long before our ancestors sprinted across the savanna and began fashioning the first crude stone tools.

I LOVE dinosaurs – I always have – for as long as I can remember. I am likely the only probation officer in the 21st Judicial District with a dinosaur collection in my office. A brief survey of my home turns up a miniature velociraptor in our bathroom, a 24-inch Brontosaurus on the patio. She had a motion-activated roar which used to scare the daylights out of our cats, but 25 years of rain and snow have silenced her. There is a small blue Stegosaur in my car and green Allosaurs in Chip's.

Yes, I love dinosaurs. But what I really want you to know is how much *God* loved dinosaurs ... but we'll get to that.

Dinosaurs occupy an odd place in our culture — loved by nearly all children, many adults, and (of course) paleontologists, and yet associated in our language and culture with failure.

Consult your dictionary, and you'll find that "dinosaur" means "one that is impractically large, out of date or obsolete. Something that has not been able to change when conditions have changed and is no longer useful" or "something or someone that has not adapted to changing circumstances."

In the years before 1990, we were taught that dinosaurs were victims of their own inability to adapt to the changing conditions that eventually led to their extinction.

We believed they were dim-witted, ponderous – and, well, *doomed* to relinquish the planet to the smarty-pants primates who would eventually invent the bicycle, Netflix, microwave popcorn and space travel.

Scientists now know that the extinction of over 600 species of dinosaurs was caused by an asteroid 8 ½ miles wide that blew a 125-mile-wide crater in the ocean crust. A blinding flash of light, ferocious winds, flying debris, searing heat, tsunamis, years of darkness and cold and ... goodbye, dinosaurs.

But, in truth, dinosaurs were long-lasting champions of resilience, and the planet was theirs alone for 231 million years. Their descendants, the birds, are still with us, and now considered to be avian dinosaurs.

231 million years!

And *Homo sapiens*? 200 thousand. A tiny fraction of the long reign of dinosaurs.

It's impossible to even comprehend those expanses of time, so I've provided a visual aid. Accurate – but not extremely detailed (show timeline)

For 231 million years, God loved dinosaurs. I know this because God has been loving and caring for creation since the beginning of time. Or, in the words of Genesis, "God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind. ... And God saw that it was good." It is God's very nature to love creation as a whole — and individually — just as God loves and sustains each of us.

In our human-centered world, we forget that God has a relationship with each member of creation. And for all those eons, God loved the baby *Triceratops*, the plant-munching *Brontosaurus*, the impossibly large *Dreadnoughtus* and the *Pterosaurs*. God loved the *Tyrannosaurus rex* (but, hey, who doesn't love T-Rex??). And the dinosaurs? They loved their lives, and, in that way, they returned God's love for them.

Their brains were as sharp and clever as those of the very intelligent ravens who are their direct descendants. They lived and moved through a landscape we will never see.

They enjoyed the smell of rain on new spring leaves. They loved, protected and taught their young. They formed complicated social groups; they mourned the death of their friends and mates.

They thrived in all habitats, in every corner of the earth, from the snow-covered polar regions to the steamy tropical forests. They were the largest animals to have ever walked the earth. They were as colorful and showy as a New Orleans Mardi Gras parade. Their voices — roars, chirps, hums and trumpeting — sounded on every continent. They ruled the sky, and their sleek bodies traveled the ocean depths.

For all those millennia **WITHOUT US**, they — and God — lived in a mysterious relationship. A communion we will never know.

God was with his ancient creatures the day the asteroid ended the reign of the dinosaurs. And God continued to watch over the Earth as new life slowly evolved.

In his book, *Why Dinosaurs Matter*, paleontologist Kenneth Lacovara says, "Evolution has no trajectory and possess no momentum."

He explains in in fascinating detail how the random twists and turns of evolution would not have produced *Homo sapiens* if the dinosaurs had not suffered a mass extinction. It would have been a very, very different planet without us. But other creatures would have evolved in our place – as they likely have evolved across the Universe, also loved and cared for by their Creator.

Dinosaurs have much to teach us about the mystery of deep time, about an Earth old beyond our ability to imagine and about a timeless God who is, was, and always has been woven into the fabric of Creation.

God and Creation are in constant motion: The Dancer and the Dance. In this year 2021, in this exact moment as I stand here in front of you, we have not stepped out of evolution. We are moving forward in a river of time, and this river of time IS God. As Luke says in Acts, “In God we live and move and have our being”.

Our home planet continues to change, and God will be God 231 million years from now – with or without human beings.

At its deepest roots, our current ecological crisis stems from our misunderstanding that humans are somehow above, or fundamental distinct from and superior to all the rest of God’s creatures. Better than dinosaurs, smarter than the great apes. More valuable than horses or chickens, polar bears or bees.

In truth – we ARE special, but only because we among all creatures have been given the responsibility to care for and protect the Earth. We bear the weight and the responsibility for treating all of creations as our kin.

This responsibility was not given to whales, elephants .... or dinosaurs. And we ARE capable of this call to stewardship.

Though the stories of our egregious environmental conduct abound, so do the stories of our empathy and respect for creation. They are just rarely headline news.

For example: The Valentine's Day winter storm of 2021 left the people of Texas shivering in the dark without electricity for days. That didn't stop thousands of volunteers from heading out into the suddenly frigid Gulf of Mexico to save over 12,000 cold-stunned green sea turtles. Sea turtles are cold-blooded, which means they rely on water temperature to regulate their body temperature. When the water falls below 50 degrees, they become catatonic, can't swim and eventually float to the surface and die.

This happens every year along the coast from Massachusetts to Florida and Texas, but never in the numbers recorded this year.

These volunteers came together from all religious, political and racial backgrounds to save ... reptiles

Not fluffy kittens or darling puppies but creatures very, very different from us.

This ability to love what is "other," what is foreign to us, may be the key to our survival and the survival of our planet. To imagine the suffering of another, whether human or non-human. To care for, protect and advocate for all life: This is the holy work we are called to as Christians.

In her book *Emergent Christ*, Ilia Delio writes:

"To love God, we must love what God loves. We are called to love this created world as God loves it. We are to help transform this universe from within by

seeing Christ in the heart of all matter – in all peoples, creatures, elements, stars  
and galaxies.”

Amen.