



From the Pulpit: December 31, 2023

Blessing the Animals—New Year's Eve

The Reverend Dr. William A. Evertsberg

Psalm 8

Snow

*O Lord, our Sovereign,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!
 You have set your glory above the heavens.
 Out of the mouths of babes and infants
 you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
 to silence the enemy and the avenger.
 When I look at your heavens, the
 work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars that you
 have established;
 what are humans that you are
 mindful of them,
 mortals that you care for them?
 Yet you have made them a little
 lower than God
 and crowned them with glory
 and honor.
 You have given them dominion over the works of your
 hands;
 you have put all things under their feet,
 all sheep and oxen,
 and also the beasts of the field,
 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
 whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
 O Lord, our Sovereign,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

“It’s a wonderfully
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Kiawah Island is a world of vast salt marshes and river deltas, where shrimp boats ply the coastal waters. *The Prince of Tides* is set not far away in coastal Carolina.

I’d already devoured the novel when it first came out, but Kathy got to read *The Prince of Tides* right there in the novel’s own world.

Have you ever read a book in its own unique geography? *The Great Gatsby* on Long Island, or *The Grapes of Wrath* in Oklahoma’s Dust Bowl or the orchards of California, or *Huck Finn* on the Mississippi, or *Moby Dick* in Nantucket?

This summer I read Ann Patchett’s novel *Tom Lake* in a cherry orchard in Leelanau County.

It’s a wonderfully enriching experience to read a book in its own unique geography, the live oaks, the marsh grasses, the armored gators, the heavy southern air, the coastal dialects, the centrality of Clemson football, the shrimp boats bobbing on the waves off the beaches, the salt-and-mud smell which brings you back to the beginning of time when primordial life crawled out of the sea. You don’t just **read** the story; you can almost **live** it.

Who’s read Pat Conroy’s novel *The Prince of Tides*? You won’t fire me if I tell you, it’s my third or fourth favorite book of all time, will you?

The Prince of Tides came out in 1986. In 1987 a member of my first church invited us to spend a few days at their place in Kiawah Island, not far from Charleston.

Anyway, there’s this story from *The Prince of Tides*. Do you remember how Tom, Luke, and Savannah Wingo go shrimping with Grandfather Amos, and one summer an albino porpoise takes up residence off the Savannah coast, and grandfather and grandchildren track her down to catch just a glimpse of an utterly unique loveliness.

The only albino porpoise ever to be sighted along the eastern seaboard, maybe the only white porpoise on the entire planet, they call her “Snow.” One day they catch sight of her, and Grandfather Amos says to the children, “If that ain’t proof of a living God, then nothing is. You’d think God’d be satisfied with just a plain porpoise. That’s as beautiful as any creature on earth. But no, God’s still up there dreaming up even more beautiful things to please the human eye.”

She surfaces 20 yards from the boat and the man and his grandchildren notice that she is not just pure white. “Faint ores of color shimmered across her back as she cut through the water, a brief silvering of her fins, evanescent color that could not be sustained. You knew she could never be the same color twice.”

And Tom, the narrator, writes, “when the white porpoise came, it was for my grandfather like seeing the white smile of God coming up at him from below. “Thank you, God. Thank you so much for this.”

Tom remembers this years later when Amos dies, and Tom finds himself wishing he could have been more like his grandfather, wishes “he could walk the southern world thanking God for oysters and porpoises, praising God for birdsong and sheet lightning, and seeing God reflected in pools of creek water and the eyes of stray cats, intoxicated with a love for God, swollen with charity like a rainbow, with eyes incapable of anything but wonder and a tongue fluent only in praise.”¹

Grandfather Amos was swollen with charity like a rainbow, with eyes incapable of anything but wonder, and a tongue fluent only in praise. Thank you, God. Thank you so much for this.

¹Pat Conroy, *The Prince of Tides* (Houghton Mifflin, 1986), pp. 276–278.

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—Prayers of the People—

Let us rejoice with the Creator
at the wonderful creation around us.

O God, you love all things that exist: and despise none of the things which you have made, for you would have made nothing you didn’t love. You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord who loves the living. For your immortal Spirit is in all things.

Bless all the creatures of the earth. We rejoice in your goodness, Lord God, shown in the beauty of little things. We marvel at the little creatures who are innocent in your sight. We extol your handiwork in the complexity of their lives. Keep us from excessive pride, from being too full of ourselves, to praise the Lord of little things.

We rejoice in the other worlds sublime and mysterious that you have made. The world of earthworms burrowing in the ground; the world of skylarks soaring above us; the world of foxes playing around their dens; the wild Mustangs of the plains; the antelope of the savannah; the diving denizens of the deep; the polar bears of the Arctic; and every beautiful beast that your hand has made.

Open our eyes to see some small facet of your beauty in each of your creations. In the name of the one who said, consider the birds of the air, Amen.

**The Prayer for the Day was written by the Reverend Professor Andrew Linzey, Senior Research Fellow in Ethics, Theology, and Animal Welfare, Blackfriars Hall, University of Oxford, and Honorary Professor of Theology, University of Birmingham. Dr. Linzey writes frequently for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.*

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