

## “Notice”

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*Part of a series on Being a Neighbour*

Luke 12.22-31; Psalm 148

October 25, 2020

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### Bestiary

In the Middle Ages, people loved bestiaries.<sup>1</sup> These were books, with information about all sorts of creatures. They described animals common to them like beaver, deer, fox and sheep. And exotic animals, like elephant, lion, crocodile. And animals of fantasy, like dragon, basilisk, and phoenix.

A bestiary describes each's biology and behaviour. Sometimes it's so accurate. Other times, it gets things really wrong. What is most important, though, is the lesson. Notice this creature! What does it teach us?

They knew that God teaches us by showing us what God makes.

Listen to this, from a bestiary made in about 1200. It once belonged to the Tudor royal family. Now it's at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland.<sup>2</sup> It's about bees.

*Expert in the task of making honey, they occupy the places assigned to them; they construct their dwelling-places with indescribable skill, and store away honey from a variety of flowers. They fill their fortress, made from a network of wax, with countless offspring. Bees have an army and kings [today, we know they are queens!] They fight battles. They flee from smoke; they are irritated by noise; many are found to have been born from the corpses of oxen. To produce them, you beat the flesh of dead calves, so that worms come forth from the putrefying blood; these later become bees<sup>3</sup>*

Okay, some things they got right. Other things, like the dead cow stuff, no!

It says a lot more, but here's the lesson.

*It is a fact that God instructs you to follow the example of that little bee and imitate its way of working. See how industrious it is, how much it is loved; everyone longs for and seeks out its fruit of its labour; this is not kept for certain kinds of people only, but grows sweet in the mouths of kings and commoners, to the enjoyment of all without distinction. Honey is not only a source of pleasure but of health; it soothes the throat and heals wounds; and it acts as a remedy for internal ulcers. Thus although the bee may be weak in terms of physical strength, it is strong in terms of its vigorous good*

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<sup>1</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestiary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestiary). Bestiaries (*bestiarum vocabulum*) were particularly popular in France and England during the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aberdeen\\_Bestiary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aberdeen_Bestiary)

<sup>3</sup> From the translation of the Latin text of the Aberdeen Bestiary, folio 53 (recto), ©University of Aberdeen. Used with permission. [www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f63r](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f63r).

*sense and love of virtue.*<sup>4</sup>

That's beautiful. It comes from an attentive, careful, and imaginative noticing.

Birds, Flowers, and all Creatures

Jesus notices, and wants to notice with him.

Notice the birds. They are free, not tied down, no work plans, nor supply chains. God looks after them quite well, and you matter more.

Notice the flowers. They don't fuss over their appearance. Yet even the most finely-tailored celebrity can't compare with how God clothes a flower. Flowers don't last long. You are made for eternity. God makes you beautiful.

Notice. These are good lessons for us, aren't they.

Notice, with Psalm 148. We launched our worship with it. Now, let's listen to Leonard Bernstein's wonderful setting. It's one of the first pieces he ever wrote . . . when he was in high school!

You can hear it here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=STnHa7OD-g4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STnHa7OD-g4)

A beautiful voice! And the psalm notices the beautiful voices of all creatures praising God. Even terrifying forces: hurricane, fire, snow and hail. Even ferocious beasts, monstrous and wild. Even rulers fair and foul. All of them tell us something of God, because over all of them is God . . . even the ones that worry us most.

A good lesson for us these days, isn't it.

Keystones

A few weeks ago, I talked about keystones.

I talked about these small stones. They are hardly noticeable. Yet they hold together the great arches in cathedrals. Keystones.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, folio 64 (verso). Immediately following is another lesson which, no doubt, those Tudor kings and queens would have commended: "*Lastly, bees defend their king, giving him the utmost amount of protection, and think it a noble act to die for him. When their king is safe, they cannot change their judgement or alter their opinion. When they have lost their king, they abandon the faithful discharge of their duty and plunder his store of honey, because he who commanded their loyalty is slain.*"

I talked about some animal species. Though they are often small in number and size, they hold together a whole ecosystem. The honeybee, for example. Keystones.

Then, I talked about us. We are Jesus' people. We belong to him. And we follow him. Not in spectacular ways, usually. No, in normal, everyday life, in our neighbourhoods. You are following Jesus in your neighbourhood. I think he is putting you here. Maybe as a keystone.

What does that mean? I got this "keystone" idea from Preston Pouteaux. He compares "Keystone People" to what he calls "Passing-Through People."<sup>5</sup> That gets at something very important. Keystones are rooted where we are. We are open to others who are there. We connect with them, and connect them. And, this is vital, we expect God is working in our neighbourhood, so we look for what God is up to.

Take this seriously. Also, joyfully. Playfully. With a sense of discovery and wonder.

In other words, notice.

## Homework

So I have homework for you. Literally. It's something to do around your home, your neighbourhood.

Here it is. . . . Go for a walk.

A slow walk. You can't notice when you're going fast.

Go for that walk, not to get somewhere. Your destination is the walk.

Your neighbourhood might be an apartment building, or a seniors' residence, or something like that. Your walk might be through the hallways. Or, maybe around the outside of the building, looking at people's balconies. Or, it might be a rural countryside. So maybe a slow ride along your sideroad or line. Be creative. Do whatever works for where you are.

There might be a reason you can't get out for a walk. That's okay. Again, be creative. Maybe go for a walk in your mind. Picture your neighbours, your neighbourhood.

Pray as you walk.

Pray with your eyes open! For safety, of course. More important, maybe, so you can

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<sup>5</sup> Preston Pouteaux, [The Bees of Rainbow Falls: Finding Faith, Imagination, and Delight in Your Neighbourhood](#) (Skyforest, CA: Urban Loft Publishers, 2017) Kindle edition. Locations 2346-2391.

notice.

*God, help me see.  
Show me what You see.  
Show me what You want me to notice,  
who you Want me to notice.*

What's going on in your neighbourhood? At different times of day? Who's out and about? Who's staying put? What do you know about your neighbours? Are there things that are connecting them to each other? Or, maybe not?

Don't pressure yourself to see. There is no grade for this homework! Simply notice what God is leading you to notice.

Holy

Noticing, who will you see?

I don't know the particular of each person, of course. But I do know their nature.

C. S. Lewis said this,

*Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself,  
your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses.<sup>6</sup>*

I mentioned Preston Pouteaux. He's a minister, and also a beekeeper. He talks about the careful noticing those folks who put together the Medieval bestiaries did. Then he says this:

*Beekeeping has made me perk up to the fact that creatures far more amazing and beautiful shuffle by me every day. Kids on their wobbly training wheels, teachers herding in a classroom after recess, or a grandparent counting off nickels and quarters in the grocery store line ahead of me. They are all amazing. I even see the guy tailgating me on the highway a little bit differently, not as the jerk we might think him to be, but as the beloved person God created to join with God in making all things new.*

*Those who have been stung by a honey bee will, in a moment, see nothing but a wicked little insect. Yet for all the stings I've received over the years (mind you, it has been very few), I have spent enough time observing the beautiful capacity of*

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<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, [The Weight of Glory](#). This was preached originally as a sermon in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford, on June 8, 1941. It was published in [Theology](#), November, 1941, and by the S.P.C.K. in 1942. Lewis, C. S.. [The Complete Works of C. S. Lewis](#) Kindle Edition. Location 59854.

*these bees that their stings make up only one small part of what makes them uniquely beautiful. Like the angry person in the big truck blazing past me on the highway, I'm starting to put even his failure into perspective. Honey bees and the world we live in us teach us some vital lessons about what God is up to.<sup>7</sup>*

What is God to around you?

Notice.

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<sup>7</sup> Pouteaux, location 565.