

Wednesday night a group of Peace people spent a beautiful night at the Twins game. During the breaks in game are other games to entertain people, one being where you are asked to put four movies in chronological order of their release date. That night the movies all starred Kevin Costner: #Bull Durham, Dances with Wolves, Untouchables and Field of Dreams. What order do you think they should be, which came out? Untouchables (87), Bull Durham (88), Field of Dreams (89), and Dances with Wolves (90). #

Wednesday at the game an image from Dances with Wolves flashed into my mind; the one of dead bison. In the movie the Sioux tribe Kevin Costner is living with is hungry, they are looking for the bison heard. The bison is the source of their clothing, food, tools—central to their way of life. Once the tribe finds the herd, they find they are not the first to come. A group of whites has been there and shot hundreds, maybe thousands taking only their hides leaving them to rot on the prairie.

I grew up just 55 miles north of Teddy Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota. Some of my early memories are bison wandering through the campground as we had breakfast or hiking through the sage brush and seeing the herd forage in the lowlands of the Little Missouri river. They are large, majestic, powerful creatures.

Through out scripture and in a number of places in Revelation and in particular in the reading today—it talks about how God regards creation, “Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature

like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle... Day and night without ceasing they sing, ‘Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.’ The four living creature represent all living creatures (wild and domestic animals, humans and birds) and all are worshiping God together. The one with the human face is of equal status with the other created beings.

Through out most of human history animals were our most valuable possessions, like the bison provided many of the things needed for life to the Native Peoples of the American Plains, sheep, goats, yak and other animals provided for our existence, especially in colder climates. The summer suns energy was stored in the animal’s fat, meat and milk. The animals were carefully cared for.

Today’s animal-welfare movement was born in the evangelical Christian movement in the 1700’s. Evangelicals’ concern for animal welfare began with John Wesley, who many consider the founder of evangelicalism. During John’s life animals began to be seen as “lower creatures” and items of property much like a shovel or plow. Early evangelicals saw brutality as against the gospel. At the same time they were working to end slavery, they worked to end cruelty toward animals.

Today, in the United States, a country that spends \$60 billion a year on pets, we would think animal cruelty is a thing of the past. Yet we still use animals for food and we understand the Bible gives its blessing on the use of

animals for food. So it's not so much a question of "if" we should eat animals, but "how" we use animals. Something that is far different then just a generation ago, is that most of us are far removed from the process by which animal produces arrive in our homes: food or clothing. It also true on many farms there has been a transition from agriculture to agribusiness. In agribusiness the animal becomes like a machine in a factory, breeding season is the first step in an assembly line. Such practices were promoted as more productive and cost-effective then the pastoral farms of our parents and grandparents. Today's industrial or factory farms use extreme confinement that allow animals little or no movement to increase ease of feeding and waste management.

I guess what it comes down to is our willingness to ask, "Does God care?" # What do you believe?

Some folks argue that in a world of limited attention and effort, we should address human injustice first, but protecting nonhuman animals also protects human animals. Animal fat in our blood is the leading cause of heart disease the world's leading cause of death, except in Africa. Factory farms are major contributors to local water and air pollution—and treat their mostly poor and undocumented workers terribly. And if you care about drug-resistant bacteria, the antibiotics poured into factory-farmed animals is serious threat to our health. It turns out that we don't have to choose—protecting nonhuman animals, protects human animals.

We are in this together... and I guess that is exactly what Revelation is saying. The picture of birds, humans, domestic and wild animals all worshiping around Jesus' throne is part of Revelation's profound truth—a journey into God's vision of hope for our world—Jesus is at the center and all creation is surrounding the throne singing, *(Stef a' cappella solo) Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty! Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee. Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty, God in three persons, blessed Trinity!* *(Steve comes in on piano everyone sings) Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee, casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea; cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee, which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.*

We are not alone in our worship of God. Jesus says, "Even the rocks will cry out." Stop and think, let that settle in, all creation, all animals human and nonhuman will sing praises to God Almighty. Jesus' love is so powerful and pervasive that as it propels us to songs of joy and works of love, in God's hope for the world the animals too cry out.

I love animals I love watching and reading about them. One of the things Revelation does is give us glimpses in to the world God hopes for, into heaven. I've pictured a lot of things about heaven but this reading gave me something new—worshiping with the animals. I know it sounds a little crazy, but it's God's picture. Amen.