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The Zoo

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The Zoo

Children's books often feature pictures of animals not found in their homes: zebras, monkeys, giraffes, and many other creatures. At any age, many of us are interested in the great diversity of animals that we can read about or perhaps observe directly in a zoo.

We might readily accept with interest the strangeness of various animals' behavior as found in a zoo, but find it difficult to acknowledge some of the diverse customs and conduct of humans. Of course, we do not bring home with us any of the animals from the zoo, but we often have occasion to relate with people whose apparent living habits differ from our own. Watching animals and then leaving them when interest or time wanes is not at all like our experience of meeting persons whose personal appearance, speech mannerisms, or points of view might differ from ours, and who are perhaps colleagues, associates, or even family members.

Widely disparate as humans can be, we are not objects of interest like animals in a zoo whose value is measured according to the preferences of viewers. Rather, each of us is of equal value to everyone else, independent of anyone's preferences. Customs, colors, languages, habits and heritages are characteristics that vary from person to person but do not define us. Even our patterns of thought and the ways we deal with feelings need not separate us from one another, since we all make decisions based on our thoughts and feelings. How we choose to relate with others not only manifests who we are, but makes us who we are, and either unites us with others or keeps us apart.

If we use the expression, "like a zoo" when we are talking about humans, we usually mean that people are not relating with one another, but act as though others are so different that they belong in distinct and separate categories, fit only for observing, and not worthy of serving. We can at times consider more seriously the external actions and appearances of people than their internal human qualities that we all have in common and which we manifest through our words and actions. If we are observers only, we will likely see people as though in a zoo; when our intention is to relate honestly with others, we will see human persons who are much more like us than they are different from us.

The best descriptions of God as our creator do not include suggestions of a zoo-keeper who might be interested and amused by our different sizes, shapes, and colors, our differing cultures, education, careers, and ways of relating with one another. Rather, each of us is a unique and treasured individual, and all of us, no matter how different we might appear to one

another, are created in "the image of God." What could we possibly have in common with God, since it is not our appearance or any of the characteristics we so readily identify in our fellow humans? God is love, and gives us the essential freedom and the proper bodies, minds, and hearts that enable us to transcend all our differences, through our capacity to love.

"So let us love, dear love, like as we ought.
Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught."
Edmund Spencer