**Camp Sunday reflections**

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This summer, I had the chance to work as camp pastor at Camp Elim (this is the MC Sask camp near Swift Current, on Lac Pelletier). Kris, my spouse, had gone to this camp as a teenager and even worked there as a counselor, so we thought we’d make a family trip out of it and all four of us would go revisit this place from Kris’ earlier years.

Our curriculum focused on caring for the animals as part of God’s good creation, using Job 12:7-10 as a memory verse. So I set out to find Bible stories and activities that would bring this to life for a group of over thirty 6- to 10-year-olds and (one 11/2 year old) during the morning Bible times and evening campfire devotions. I should also mention that this is not my usual audience! I have much more experience with teaching adults, so I was a bit nervous going in.

Well, my highlight was definitely getting to know the kids as we explored this theme together! There were a few moments that were especially meaningful:

* During our first campfire session, we had all gathered around the fire with the cactus-studded hills all around us. I was just starting to introduce the theme of animals to the children, when a deer appeared high on one of the hills, silhouetted against the sunset. It was an awe-inspiring sight that set the tone for our gathering!
* During one of the morning sessions, the kids and I got really into a “web of life” activity. We talked about the interconnections between animals and habitats as a web and then I handed out animal and plant cards to the kids. We then threw a ball of yarn across to each other based on relationships – for example, the green plant was eaten by the rabbit, the rabbit was then connected to the fox, etc. – until we had formed a complex and tangled web. We also had someone drop their string to represent extinction, and then talked about how our actions as humans can throw God’s web of life off balance.
* We learned together about how WE rely on ANIMALS, too. God has given pollinators like bees a special job to help us grow food, and bee populations in particular are in trouble. We learned about ways to help these creatures that we rely on for most of our crops and gardens to grow.
* On our final campfire night, we read Psalm 104, a thanksgiving psalm which praises God for creation and the ways that God cares for all the animals. I then had the children write short Psalms of their own about their favourite animals, and the results were simple and delightful. Here are a few:

“Prayer to gophers: keep gophers safe, and give them food.”

“Praise the Lord for ducks or dogs.”

“Thank you for the birds because they are super cute.”

“Turtles: they’re brown and green and thank you.”

“Thank you for the antelope. Thank you for the deer. Thank you for the cheetah. Protect the cheetah cause they’re rare.”

I came away from the experience grateful for the profound faith of children, and for the opportunities camps provide for them to explore their faith. Their insights and questions taught me a lot as we spent time together at Camp Elim. Thanks be to God.