

Sermon Preached October 4, 2015, 8:00 am service only
Blessing of the Animals
St. John's Episcopal Church
Beverly Farms, Massachusetts
The Rev. Stephanie Chase Bradbury

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.

I'd like to begin today by showing you a picture that I will be showing the kids at the 10 o'clock service. This is a pastel drawing of a cat named "Chum." Chum belonged to my great uncle and aunt, Nelson and Betty Chase. When I was three years old we visited them and I became enamored of Chum. I believe my attempts at loving the cat, however, after a time became unwelcome, and the poor thing jumped up onto a sunny table to get away from me, and curled up for a nap. I was distraught at not being able to play with Chum, so in an attempt to appease me my Uncle Nelson, who was an artist, drew me a picture of Chum as the cat slept. This allowed Chum some peace, of course, as I could not touch the model while he was posing. I treasure this picture as a memory of that day.

But what if I had been unappreciative of the picture and had promptly torn it in half after it was given to me? I suspect Uncle Nelson would have been unhappy with his work and his creation being treated so poorly. Do any of you have a recollection of a gift you gave to someone, preferably something which you had made, which was then unappreciated? No one likes to see the work of their hands, given in love, disregarded or destroyed. So too it is with God. The Almighty made the entire universe, not just humanity, but all of creation, and gave it to us, as it says in Genesis, to “till and to tend.” [Genesis 2:15]. We are its stewards. Pollution of the earth, the “inhumane” treatment of animals, and the suffering of children in poverty, are all part of the same package. All parts of the creation are valuable to God, animate and inanimate, and we are to treat all of it with respect. To do otherwise would be the equivalent of taking a gift made with love for you and throwing it into the trash.

God recognizes we need to use some of the earth to meet our needs, but it simply must be done respectfully and wisely. We are to use the earth’s resources in ways which care for our needs, but which don’t destroy the Creation. To use the interest, but not the capital. A use which doesn’t disregard this great Creation, but rather sees in it the love of God made manifest and tangible. I think our pets are one way that God helps us understand how it is we are to see **all** of the creation.

Our pets create a bridge between us and this gift of the earth. A way to help us appreciate even the parts of the creation which are unfamiliar to us.

Jesus himself did not come to earth to save only humanity. Jesus came to save the entirety of creation! In Romans 8 St. Paul speaks about the work of Christ and that through it, “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” [Romans 8:21]. And in John 3:16, it says “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” The actual Greek word used is not “world,” but “cosmos.” In other words, the Son was sent in order that the entire cosmos might be saved through him.

If God can humble himself and take on human form and suffer and die to save the oceans and the air and the plants and the animals, then perhaps we too can hold them a little more gently.

In the 7th century the monk, St. Isaac the Syrian wrote about the need to love and have mercy for all of the creation. That it is part of the Christian life. I will close with a quote of his. He writes,

“What is a merciful heart? It is a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, for the birds, for the animals, for demons, and for all that exists. By the recollection of them the eyes of a merciful person pour forth tears in abundance. By the strong and vehement mercy that grips such a person’s heart, and by such great compassion, the heart is humbled and one cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in any in creation. For this reason, such a person offers up tearful prayer continually even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm her or him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner such a person prays [even] for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in a heart that is in the likeness of God.”¹

Amen.

¹ <http://blogs.ancientfaith.com/glory2godforallthings/2006/11/01/words-from-st-isaac-of-syria/>