

Home Worship Service, May 17, 2020

With special remembrance and celebration of God's creatures, including our pets.

To Prepare for Today's Service *If you have animals you'd like to bless, you might like to have them present or within reach - or a picture of them if they can't be with you in your home, e.g. if they are horses or other beings who do better outdoors. And if you have animals in your memory, beloved departed ones, you are invited to have a picture of them or a symbol and perhaps a candle by it.*

We Sing All Things Bright and Beautiful.

https://youtu.be/QDf6T8_uKeE images of some children's favourite animals

Refrain:

***All things bright and beautiful,
all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful,
In love God made them all.***

***Each little flow'r that opens,
each little bird that sings,
God made their glowing colors,
God made their tiny wings. [Refrain]***

***The purple-headed mountain,
the river running by,
the sunset, and the morning
that brightens up the sky. [Refrain]***

***The cold wind in the winter,
the pleasant summer sun,
the ripe fruits in the garden,
God made them, ev'ry one. [Refrain]***

***God gave us eyes to see them,
and lips that we might tell
how great is God our Maker,
who has made all things well. [Refrain]***

Opening Prayer from Celebrate God's Presence

Loving God, you created us and all living beings for beauty, for happiness, for one another. With all our hearts, we thank you God.

For all life that comes from you: the growth in the garden, the pets who are our friends; all your creatures in the great outdoors; people whom we love; with all our hearts, we thank you God.

For the delight we have known in beloved humans and beloved animals, in times of play, through moments of anxiety, in the companionship of passing years; with all our hearts, we thank you God.

Readings

Job 12:7-10

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.

Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In God's hand is the soul of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.

Psalm 104 v 24-35

O God, how manifold are your works!

With Wisdom at your side, you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

There lies the great and mighty Sea, teeming with living things both great and small.

Upon it sail the ships, and there is Leviathan, the monster you made to play in it.

All these look to you, to give them their food in due season.

What you give them, they gather up. When you open your hand, you fill them with good things.

But when you hide your face, they despair. When you take away their breath, they die, and return to dust.

But when you send out your spirit, they live again, and you renew the face of the earth.

May your glory, O God, endure forever. **May you rejoice, O God, in your works.**

When you look at the earth, it trembles.

When you touch the mountains, they smoke.

I will sing to God as long as I live. **I will praise my God while I have being.**

Poem. "The Sweetness of Dogs" by Mary Oliver from Dog Songs

What do you say, Percy? I am thinking
of sitting out on the sand to watch
the moon rise. It's full tonight.
So we go
and the moon rises, so beautiful it
makes me shudder, makes me think about
time and space, makes me take
measure of myself: one iota
pondering heaven. Thus we sit, myself
thinking how grateful I am for the moon's
perfect beauty and also, oh! how rich
it is to love the world. Percy, meanwhile,
leans against me and gazes up
into my face. As though I were just as wonderful
as the perfect moon.

Pangur Bán a 9th century Irish poem translated by Seamus Heaney. {pangur bán means white cat}

Pangur Bán and I at work,
Adepts, equals, cat and clerk:
His whole instinct is to hunt,
Mine to free the meaning pent.

More than loud acclaim, I love
Books, silence, thought, my alcove.
Happy for me, Pangur Bán
Child-plays round some mouse's den.

Truth to tell, just being here,
Housed alone, housed together,
Adds up to its own reward:
Concentration, stealthy art.

Next thing an unwary mouse
Bares his flank: Pangur pounces.
Next thing lines that held and held
Meaning back begin to yield.

All the while, his round bright eye
Fixes on the wall, while I
Focus my less piercing gaze
On the challenge of the page.

With his unsheathed, perfect nails
Pangur springs, exults and kills.
When the longed-for, difficult
Answers come, I too exult.

So it goes. To each his own.
No vying. No vexation.
Taking pleasure, taking pains,
Kindred spirits, veterans.

Day and night, soft purr, soft pad,
Pangur Bán has learned his trade.
Day and night, my own hard work
Solves the cruxes, makes a mark.

Reflection

It's been a while since I had a mousing cat-. But still I take inspiration from watching my cats as this long ago monk did. .

Be that as it may, I wanted to celebrate and bless our animals before I finished working with you. I'd picked a venue but it never seemed quite the right time. A physical gathering of humans and animals isn't in the cards any time soon. But one joy of Zoom worship is- you can have your pets with you any Sunday you like -. Several are very keen churchgoers, And those of you at home can be with your pets too.

If you don't have pets, you can look out the window and enjoy the springtime chorus of birds- maybe enjoying goodies from your bird feeders. At least one of us is using social distancing time to create bird houses and bird feeders. Or you can think of animals you once knew, perhaps when you were children or when you were raising children and wanted them to experience family pets. I don't know if any of you had history with 4 H- where you might learn to raise a calf or train a horse.

One thing I know- those with pets often find them a great comfort, a great consolation, in stressful times and isolated times.

As a very shy young person, I remember by name other people's pets with whom I felt at ease. Some children pour out their troubles to the family pet.

One woman, long since deceased, who coped with a difficult childhood by talking to her horse.

A youth in challenging circumstances found her joy in riding her horse, bareback, given the chance.

A farm woman who grieved the loss of the family farm because of a cow who was her cherished confidante. In this pandemic season, some of you have preserved your mental health and physical health by walking your dogs.

And some of us have had extra cuddles with our cats.

When I lost my two sweet cats within 2 weeks

I realized how much of my mental and emotional health I owed to companion cats,

So now I'm starting over again- with kittens, one is here today, another soon to arrive.

For so many solitaires, animal company makes all the difference-

For Mary Oliver as she walked or sat in nature with her doge.

For that long ago Irish monk or the hermit mystic Julian of Norwich with their cats.

So what has that to do with spiritual life?

We do well to ask. God's creatures for spiritual instruction as was suggested to Job in our first reading.

No wonder Matthew Fox, Dominican monk and now Episcopal priest, picked his dog as his spiritual director.

First: animals teach us to marvel at creation-and especially at the intelligence of species other than our own.

How do our pets know so much without speaking our language?

How do birds figure out how to survive the changes of season,

And manage complex migratory paths year after year?

And animals in the wild can teach us much about survival, resilience, adaptability-

All lessons we too need to learn in these pandemic times, in this climate emergency times.

Then, animals teach us about being present- something we are not always good at.

We second-guess the past and we obsess about the future- even though this just stresses us out and gives us insomnia.

As I watch my pets, they live in the now.

When they eat, they eat.

When they drink water, they drink water.

When they sleep, they sleep.

When they cuddle, they cuddle.

When they play, they play.

They are acutely aware of their surroundings, using all their senses to the full.

They don't even attempt to multi-task.

Animals have learned pandemic wisdom already.

They aren't - most of them- on earth long but they make every moment count- and when they cross into Mystery , they've lived as fully as they can.

That's wisdom for us too.

Partly, we have to be present, notice our surroundings, to keep ourselves and each other safe.

But more than that.

We've lost our security about the future-

Thinking about it too much is not good for us.

Some of us may need professional help to manage our emotions in these days-

But here's what can help us all :

One day at a time, one moment at a time.

Stop what you are doing.

Enjoy that cup of coffee .

Enjoy that glass of water.

Enjoy your dinner.

Enjoy what's out your window.

Sit with some favourite music.

Lose yourself in a craft or woodwork or gardening.

Stroll for your soul, if you are taking part in that-

At any rate, enjoy the fresh air, watch for signs of summer, feel the warmth of the lengthening days,

Go sit or walk by your favourite bay or river or lake view.

Go fishing or paddling if that's what you enjoy.

Phone a friend or neighbour or family member- and just be there with them- - let everything else be.

If you pray, just be with your breath- if thoughts come , let them come and go, like ships passing through the harbour.

And finally,

As Mary Oliver's poem reflects, no human could love you more or better than your animal companions do.

Animals don't care if you are still in your PJS, if your pandemic hair has gone wild, if your house is a mess.

They get to the heart of the matter- they see into your soul and that's what they love.

When they are with you , they are totally with you- delighting in your presence-

Not only when they want feeding- but just wanting to spend time with you.

They think you are wonderful just as you are.

We can learn from their way of loving-

As we share time and attention warmth and kindness and virtual hugs

Wholeheartedly,

Knowing there is nothing more important we could be doing.

Learning the wisdom of God's creatures.

Learning how to live now.

Learning how to love to the full.

That's how we will get through these times.

May it be so!

We Sing. Each Blade of Grass [Keri Wehlander/Linnea Good. Sung by Grace United Church, Dartmouth]
<https://youtu.be/HVMT087Ifso>

***Each blade of grass, ev'ry wing that soars, the waves that sweep across a distant shore, make full the circle of God.
Each laughing child, ev'ry gentle eye, a forest lit beneath a moon-bright sky, make full the circle of God.
Each silent paw, ev'ry rounded stone,
the buzz that echoes from a honey'd comb, make full the circle of God.
Each fire-brimmed star, ev'ry outstretched hand, the wind that leaps and sails across the land,
make full the circle of God.
Each icy peak, ev'ry patterned shell,
the joyous chorus that the dawn foretells, make full the circle of God.
Each cosmic hue, ev'ry creature's way, all form the beauty of this vast
array, making full the circle of God.***

Remembrance of the Animals. [prayer from Celebrate God's Presence]

Looking at pictures or pictures of departed animals, if any, or remembering animals you have known [they might be from childhood, the family farm, someone else's pet you loved etc]

O God, smile on our hearts [my heart] saddened by the loss of this beloved *pet/animal*, who inspired in us a love for all your creation. Praise to you, O God, for the gift of life and for the love of *N. (name of pet/animal)*; with all our hearts, we thank you God. Amen.

Meditation "We Give Thanks for The Animals" by Gary Kowalski

We give thanks for the animals
Who live close to nature,
Who remind us of the sanctities of birth and death,
Who do not trouble their lives with foreboding or grief,
Who let go each moment as it passes,
And accept each new one as it comes
With serenity and grace.
Enable us to walk in beauty as they do
At one with the turning seasons,
Welcoming the sunrise and at peace with sunset.
And as we hallow the memory of good friends now departed,
Who loved abundantly and in their time were loved,
Who freely gave us their affection and loyalty,
Let us not be anxious for tomorrow
But ask only that kindness and gratitude fill our hearts,
Day by day, into the passing years.

Blessing of the Animals Words of Blessing by Tracy Sprowls-Jenks

Home worshippers: if your animal is with you, speak to him or her by name, and Bless him/her as follows or in whatever word you wish:

[Name of animal], may you live a long, happy, and blessed life—may there be food in your belly, a warm place to sleep and joy in your days. [touch the animal on the head or cuddle them as the blessing is spoken]

You can also say a blessing for any animals not living with you in whom you take an interest, perhaps an animal dear to someone else's heart, or an animal you know from volunteering in the animal shelter, or an animal in need.

"Blessing for All"

by L. Annie Foerster (adapted)

My furry, feathered and scaled friends, I greet you. You come from the same life force of creation that I do and I greet you as a sister (brother). May your days be filled with love and whatever else you may desire. May your tummy always be full and may you always have a place to rest. May you have many days of love with your human friends. May you play together and work together in gentleness and respect for one another...My furry, feathered and scaled friends, I say farewell. I am happy to have met you. May your life be blessed.

Minute for Mission by Sharon Hannan

In honour of today's blessing and remembrance of our pets, I share this special Minute for Mission. A large denominational Protestant congregation in St. Louis, Missouri has an active pet ministry. This ministry, called 'Noah's Ark', runs a pet food drive, supports a no-kill rescue, brings pets to visit the sick and the elderly, and also hosts a grief group for those who have lost a pet. A church in Danvers, MA operates a therapy dog program in local schools. These efforts are often spear-headed by the congregation's animal lovers.

For several years, a St. Stephen resident has taken his trained therapy dog to Milltown Elementary School and to Lincourt Manor. During COVID-19, a Nova Scotia trucker has transported dogs to their new owners in various places throughout Canada. These two (2) individuals recognize the value and importance of pets in people's lives.

One church pet-ministry member has made this observation, "Animals have the most Christlike love available. A dog will forgive you over and over again."

May our mission this day be one of love and forgiveness. Amen

Offering

Blessed Creator, we give thanks for all good gifts, especially today the wonder and diversity of all your creatures. May we make this a fit world, a safe world, a compassionate world for all beings, animal or human, as we live out your love for the world. We express this love as we care for each other, care for your creatures, care for your earth. May our offerings to church, community and world reflect our love and your love. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Creative One, we give thanks indeed for creation, for companion animals, for human friends and loved ones, for all that fills us with joy and wonder and tells us we are not alone.

We pray in these days especially for any animals who are ill, or homeless, or neglected, or in any way suffering.

And for wildlife endangered by human actions.

May we seek a safe, humane world for all beings, including animal beings.

And we pray for humans too who are ill, homeless, neglected, deprived of the care they need,

Those humans awaiting surgery or diagnosis or treatment, especially amid the delays of pandemic times,

Those suffering from COVID-19, especially the many in long-term care and the frontline workers.

Those grieving the loss of loved ones from COVID-19 or other causes,

In these times where we lack our usual ways of gathering and caring for each other.

In a moment of silence we hold in love and light those who need our prayers...

We ask that this same love and light surround us, from your Spirit who prays through us with sighs too deep for words, These and all the prayers of our hearts we gather into words shared by communities around the world and across the ages: Our Father [or Mother or Creator or...]...

Announcements, Joys and Concerns

As in Coop plus following two

Thurs May 21 Shirley McMahon's 95th birthday parade 1:45 gather at Old Ridge Hall, 2 p.m. drive to St Stephen Seniors complex, enter 1st driveway, exit second. Birthday wishes to Shirley at 9057-NB 3, Old Ridge, NB E3L 4W6.

Sat May 23 Passamaquoddy Lodge Car Parade - marshalling 1:45, parade at 2, starting from O Neill Centre parking lot behind fire truck and public works vehicle. Decorate car. Decorate or ride your bike. If walking, join at corner of Sophia and Prince of Wales. Observe social distance. To brighten day for Lodge residents and staff

We Sing It's the song of praise to the Maker <https://youtu.be/rh6iYBZjr4A>
by Ruth Duck and Ron Klusmeier] played by Klusmeier with a pickup choir in Carman UC. BC 2009

*"It's a song of praise to the Maker, the thrush sings high in the tree.
It's a song of praise to the Maker, the gray whale sings in the sea,
And by the Spirit you and I can join our voice to the holy cry
And sing, sing, sing to the Maker too.
It's a call of life to the Giver when waves and waterfalls roar.
It's a call of life to the Giver when high tides break on the shore,
And by the Spirit...
It's a hymn of love to the Lover; the bumblebees hum along.
It's a hymn of love to the Lover, the summer breeze joins the song,
And by the Spirit...
It's the chorus of all creation; it's sung by all living things.
It's the chorus of all creation; a song the universe sings,
And by the spirit..."*

Blessing by John O'Donohue

Nearer to the earth's heart
Deeper within its silence:
Animals know this world
In a way we never will.

May we learn to return
And rest in The beauty
Of animal being,
Learn to lean low.
Leave our locked minds,
And with freed senses
Feel the earth
Breathing with us.

May we enter
Into lightness of spirit
And slip frequently into
The feel of the wild.

We Go Forth Singing Dance with the Spirit by Jim and Jeanie Strathdee with lovely visuals
<https://www.facebook.com/jeanie.strathdee/videos/2757066087749502>