

Sermon
Creation Care/Saint Francis
St. Andrew's, Methuen
October 3, 2021
William Bradbury

Genesis 2:18-25
Psalm 148:7-14
Revelation 5:11-14
Matthew 6:25-34

On this Pet Blessing Sunday, for those of us who have loved our pets it is easy to be grateful to God.

I'm grateful for all the dogs our family had through the years. The first dog I remember was a large mixed breed named Bobo. One day when I was three and playing in the yard, Bobo took on a violent German Shepherd that came too close to me and drove it away.

My last dog was Charlie, who my son and his growing family couldn't keep, so I picked him up at Logan Airport at midnight and he became my constant companion and guardian of our home for 8 years, until he suddenly fell out July 2020. His ashes sit on the altar in my study, filling me with gratitude for the love of God that streams through "all creatures, great and small."

Think about this: This process of life started 13.8 billion years ago and now here we are spinning around on the third rock from the sun, filled with the blessings of God.

I am grateful that you and I are here and not just a bunch of hydrogen gas.

But we know there's more to the story.

One beautiful Saturday afternoon twenty years ago in small town Washington, North Carolina, I was walking home from a prayer workshop at church and across the street I see two dogs loping along: a huge Rottweiler and a smaller Boxer. They seemed to be happy, so I thought nothing of it when they crossed the street and came up behind me---and then with absolutely no warning—the rottweiler took a bite out of my right leg and the boxer bit my left.

Terrified I ran into a parking lot, jumped up on the hood of a car, cracking the windshield as I climbed up onto the roof.

An old country woman was driving by when she said the Lord told her to pull in, so she swung her big old Buick next to the car I was on, and when the dogs backed away, I climbed down into the safety of her car.

The police later told me that the dogs belonged to a 22-year-old guy who usually kept the dogs chained up but who also regularly beat them with a 4-foot piece of steel pipe.

Somewhere along the line this young man had been damaged by violent grown-ups and he passed on that damage and violence to his dogs.

As Richard Rohr reminds us: If we do not transform our pain, we will transmit it to those around us.

Which is what we human beings do: It's no accident that there's an island of garbage the size of Texas floating around the Pacific. It's no accident that the toxins we discharge into the air are creating climate weirding in which glaciers melt, seas rise, and 100-year storms become every 10-year storms.

The voices in our head demand the world make us happy: this must happen and that must not happen in order to make us feel good inside. And when we don't get what we want, we get upset and transmit our suffering to others, especially to those others who are different from us.

Some even ask God to punish those **others** who we hold responsible for our unhappiness.

But instead, God sends Jesus, a homeless first century Jew, crucified by Empire, who comes among us, not as a judge to punish, but as healer to transform.

Jesus gathers into his community those who have been abused by the occupying army of Rome or abused by those who exclude them from fellowship because they don't fit the ideal standard of the Law or those abused by sickness and poverty.

Then on the cross Jesus takes into himself the fear, anger, and violence of our race and gives back to us the peace, forgiveness, and unconditional love of God.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

Turns out the young man who beat his dogs had been a classmate of my daughter. His grandparents went to my church. His name was Christopher—the Christ Bearer—which reminds us that he is precisely the kind of person Jesus wants to liberate from his demons.

Just like we are precisely the kind of people Jesus wants to liberate from our inner voices that demand our world meet our every need.

In Jesus we no longer need to keep our painful memories in a destructive feedback loop in our mind.

Instead, we can relax into the unconditional care of Christ, and release our hurts, fears, regrets, and disappointments to God.

Jesuit and wisdom teacher Anthony DeMello tells of a man who said of himself:

"I was neurotic for years. I was anxious and depressed and selfish. Everyone kept telling me to change. I resented them, and I agreed with them, and I wanted to change, but simply couldn't, no matter how hard I tried.

What hurt most was that, like others, my best friend kept insisting that I change. So I felt powerless and trapped. Then one day, another friend said to me, "Don't change, I love you just as you are."

Those words were music to my ears: "Don't change. Don't change. Don't change...I love you as you are."

I relaxed. I came alive. And suddenly I changed!

Now I know that I couldn't really change until I found someone who would love me whether I changed or not." *In The Spirituality of Imperfection* by Kurtz and Ketcham, p123

Our pets, reflecting their creator, accept us whether we change or not. As Saint Francis tells us: "Ask the beasts and they will teach you the beauty of this earth."

Our work is to soak ourselves in God's acceptance.

This is why Jesus says in our Gospel reading, in The Message translation:

"Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

³⁴ **"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes."**

Christ calls us to walk out of the prison of our past into the Peace that passes all understanding—the Realm of God.

Apostle Paul says that creation waits in eager longing for us to claim our inheritance as the free children of God.

For as we heal, creation heals, and the world is flooded with the glory of God.