

Sermon: With Hoot and Squawk and Squeak and Bark

Year B, Proper 22

[Psalm 104:10-25](#)

Offered October 4, 2015 to Brookline Community Church, Brookline, NH

Rev. Catherine A. Merrill

Animal Blessing

‘ [Animal’s name], you were created by God, and you are loved by God. May you and your human family experience joy and companionship together, and continue to be a blessing to each other. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.’

Sermon

Earlier this week, there were two flies in my office. Then there was one and a schmear on my desk. Then two, then one and two smears. Then three. Apparently I took the two stupid ones out of the gene pool in the early rounds. Which made me wonder if I hadn’t perhaps missed the point of today’s service.

This is my first blessing of the animals. So I was a little anxious about the ratios of barking to growling, purring to hissing. Of course, that is what I worry about every Sunday, with the animals that come to church. Barbara Reid wrote [a wonderful children’s book, *Two by Two*](#), that we’ll use during our study of Living Stewardship in November. It tells the story of Noah’s Ark. After the rains have passed, “with hoot and squawk and squeak and bark, the animals tumbled off the ark”. Noah’s ark is a stewardship story because it reminds us that God has given us the responsibility to care for the life on this planet.

But one thing we don’t often notice in the Noah’s ark story is that *all* the animals came out of the ark. After all the tumbling was done, Noah and his family came out of the ark. Our animals companions teach us so much about being the human animals we are. They teach us to sleep when we are tired, to snuggle when we are lonely. They teach us to notice new things along a walk we have done a million times. We may not see why this tree is so much better than the previous one, but they know. They show us how much fun you can have without a cell phone, especially if someone leaves the toilet paper dangling slightly. They love us because we came home. It’s only right to bless them because they bless us every day.

The animals in the wild bless us too, because they keep the webs of life thrumming. The animals on the farms that feed us bless us because even if we are vegetarian, animals often provide the fertilizer for our food.

So let’s bless them today. But if we’re worried about ratios, blessing them one day for lifetimes of love doesn’t seem quite enough. Let’s bless them every day by being the stewards God called us to be back on that day with all the hooting and squawking and squeaking and barking, on the day when we all tumbled out of the ark to care for each other. The rest of the animals have been caring for us. We need to remember that we have to care for them.

Please join me in a prayer of confession:

Prayer of Confession

Leader: We thank you for abundant life; for the birds we hear in the morning, for the vast tapestry of life which is interwoven,

All: We give you thanks.

Leader: We thank you for the gift of our own animal companions; For the joy they bring us, For the unconditional love and forgiveness which teaches us about you; For the confidant and the stress-releaser they are, For the benefits they are to our health-and to our Spirit.

All: We give you thanks.

Leader: And yet, we know that we have not always been faithful caretakers of our animals; Forgive us when we have dirtied their environment, erased places of shelter, polluted the waters, killed off their food supplies or neglected to feed or tend animals in our own communities.

Forgive us when we have neglected our own animal companions; when we have said we are too busy to play with them, when we have shooed them away; when we have made excuses, saying we are too tired...too busy...more important engagements have come up...so that we do not walk them, cuddle them, spend time with them.

All: Forgive us when we have not loved them as they have loved us.

Leader: Forgive us when we have not considered the wider picture. When we have neglected the animals in the wild, When we have inflicted cruelty in the name of food production or under the guise of entertainment. When we have focused only on our 'favorites' and neglected the care of the supposedly less beautiful, those who hold a lower public profile.

Each year more animals are becoming extinct, or are added to the endangered species list: forgive us, for allowing beauty to be forever destroyed.

All: Forgive us when we neglect to see all animals as part of your creation, forgive us when we neglect to acknowledge that your love beats in all hearts, and that you give breath to all creation.

Leader: God is love. Take hold of this forgiveness, and live your life, knowing that you are forgiven, and deeply loved.

All: Through Jesus Christ we are forgiven.