



The Federated Church of Hyannis

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Weekly Message from the Pastor and Sermon Notes for July 25, 2021

From the announcement letter I am sure you will see a lot is happening at the Federated Church. This is all possible because of extraordinary members like you who help support the ministry of the church. The goal is to serve and expand the church's outreach. Your prayers, time, and contributions continue to bless so many. Thank you.

Rev. Derek L. White

Sermon: BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS

Scripture: Genesis 6:11-22

From the story of creation in Genesis, one of the first tasks Adam was given by God was to name the living creatures that filled the sea, roamed the earth, and flew in the sky. Adam gave each and every one of them a name. From the Hebrew Scriptures always comes the question of “why God?”. Why did God ask Adam to name the creatures? There are many reasons, but two predominant reasons come from the tradition of interpreting scripture.

The first explanation is that God made Adam a partner in the creation story. As God spoke and called everything into existence, God gave all the parts of the universe names by which it was to be called. The Sun to govern the day and the Moon to govern the night, the expanses of dry land to separate the waters. The Lord created these things, called them into being, and called them good. But the names of the animals God gave to Adam so as to be a partner in the creation story. This is because God had created Adam in God’s likeness, a participant in the creation of the world. So from this tradition of scripture, we can see there is a special relationship between humans and animals.

The second explanation in interpreting the scriptures is that God entrusted Adam and Eve to be caretakers of creation. First, they were active participants in the creation story, then they were given the responsibility to be caretakers of

creation. Caring for the animals was part of the second task God gave to Adam and Eve.

If we follow this path of looking in scripture, we can see God then gave the responsibility to care for the animals in the story of Noah. God gave Noah specific instructions to build an ark and fill it with food and supplies to save the animals on earth. From this example of scripture, we can see God deeply cares for the animals. And as humans, one of the purposes God has given to humanity is to be caretakers of the earth. Animals are part of God's creation called good. Our role is to be participants and caretakers of creation.

There is something deeply spiritual in the bond of caring for an animal. But there is also something deeply profound in the ways animals care and love for us too. They can sense changes in us through gifts and abilities in ways we as humans often are unable to detect. A good friend of mine recently got a therapy dog for PTSD. Having this dog has been a life saver. The dog can detect when his PTSD is being triggered and creates the safe space he needs to be able to reset. It is remarkable how this dog can sense and provide him safe space to manage his PTSD.

In the past I have been someone who has used a morale dog trained to work with troops. The presence of the dog helped break down walls that made counseling sessions much more productive. I remember once having to do a casualty notification, and a big black dog in the home of the person kept putting its head on my lap. I was covered in fur. But the presence of that dog made one of the hardest things I have ever had to do possible. That dog made its owner through the tears be able to laugh and smile for brief moments to manage the pain of losing a loved one.

During one of my clinical residencies programs, I worked with PTSD therapy horses. It taught me the importance of body language and being able to connect without using words. You can't lie to a horse. They are truly authentic creatures who will only trust you if you trust them.

The truth is animals make our world truly beautiful. This is a planet with so much diversity of life. And there is something special in the theology of that. While scientists debate if there is life on other planets, we know this planet is filled with life. Because of the richness of that diversity of life, earth truly is a blessed planet.

Many here at Federated Church have special animals that provide love, comfort, and companionship. And because of that special bond, we celebrate the blessing of animals that impact our lives in a positive way. So I am delighted for today to be the first Blessing of the Animals here at Federated Church.