



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year A - Proper 22 – October 8, 2017

Today we honor and remember Saint Francis of Assisi. St. Francis, of course, is remembered for many things. He founded a religious order. He stripped naked in front of his bishop and left all his clothes on the floor in defiance of his rich father who greatly discouraged him from joining the religious life. He was also a stigmata, one whose body bled in the same places where Christ was nailed to the cross, and also from the head on which was placed Christ's crown of thorns.

But St. Francis is probably best known for his love of animals and the spiritual connection that he had with them, including the wolf of Gubbio, whom he tamed and placated the fears of Gubbio's villagers. From that time on, the wolf of Gubbio and the villagers lived together in peace and harmony.

And people may say, "How can someone like that actually communicate with animals?" But I know that it's possible and I know that it's true. Years ago, I went out to the Valley of the Temple to mark the 49th anniversary of the death of my great grandfather at the Buddhist temple in the back of the cemetery. And at that time, there was an old Japanese man who was the caretaker there. He would welcome visitors and then amaze them with his gift of being able to call certain birds out of the trees--not just any bird, but actual, specific birds with whom he had an affinity.

He also had the skill to call certain carp to the shore of the pond where he would give them bits of bread to eat—again, not just any carp but actual, specific carp with whom he also had an affinity. It was so much fun to watch the birds flutter out of the trees and land on his hand or to watch the carp with their mouths on the surface of the water dashing toward him like they were surfing or something.

It was really amazing to watch.

There's something about animals. Whenever I go home to see my grandmother, I always walk into the house and sit on the couch and her four dogs come up and bark and jump on me and lick my face to greet me. And it brings me such joy, because I know that those dogs love me unconditionally—while many humans don't. That's just the way it is.

And so it's through the animals that I feel what the love of God might be like and I can see why they meant so much to Francis and why he encouraged us to be kind and loving to all God's creatures. Not only is that God's will for us; to take care of God's creatures, but it also gives us an opportunity to feel what the love of God must be like. That's the gift of the animals to us.

And so today we bless our pets. And we ask for God's presence to continue to dwell in them and to bless us in turn with their unconditional love.

Pentecost 18 – Proper 22 – October 8, 2017, cont'd

And before we bless our pets, I close with the words attributed to St. Francis. Please join me if you know them:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Amen.