

Pet Blessing Service

Sunday 8 October 2017, Cashmere Presbyterian Church
led by Silvia Purdie

Set-up: toy animals around the church

DVD of pet photos showing before the service

Basket of chocolates for birthdays

Kids activity: cut out shapes of animals for making a collage

ORDER OF SERVICE:

Welcome to worship

Welcome to this special service to honour St Francis and our animal friends
Welcome to humans and animals this morning, for all are important to God
Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

Where there is injury, bring pardon;

Where there is doubt, grow faith

Where there is darkness, bring light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

Opening Hymn: All things bright and beautiful

Call to Worship: Psalm 148: Calling all creation!

Give praise to God!

You angels in heaven, sing out glory.

You stars, sun and moon, shine bright with praise!

God dreamed you and called you and here you are!

You fish and whales and squid, sing praise in the deep.

You elements of nature, fire, rain, wind,
cold and heat, stone and mountain - praise!

God dreamed you and called you and here you are!

You plants and forests, praise God as you flower and fruit.

You mammals, insects, reptiles and birds - praise!

God dreamed you and called you and here you are!

You people, Presidents and nobodies, rich and poor,
women and men and girls and boys,
in every corner of planet Earth,

God dreamed you and called you and here you are!

So listen out for the Name that is above every Name,
sing out with all the love and joy you can find
for all you are is made by God,

all you have is gift from God.

Calling all creation – come and be found in praise!

Sharing time

Tell the person behind or in front of you something funny about your pet ... or an animal you got to know – something adorable about them

Pet blessing

Most high, almighty Lord, our Creator,
yours are the praise, the glory and the honour!

To you alone all things belong.

Be praised for giving us the animals, birds and fish which fill your world.

May we think of you and thank you when we play with and care for our pets.

Bless and protect them, Lord, for you love all your creatures.

Help us to always be good to our pets, so that they may be happy and healthy.

O God, your world is wonderful. Help us to care for all living things. Amen.

If you have brought a pet you are invited to bring them to the front of the church for a blessing.

Lord bless these our pets, both those here with us this morning, and those we see in photos, both in our loving memory and at home.

THE BLESSING OF EACH PET (INDIVIDUALLY)

"N. (*name of animal,*) may you be blessed in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. May you and N. (*the name of the "owner"*) enjoy life together and find joy with the God who created you."

(turn off powerpoint)

Hymn: O God, your creatures fill the earth

(written by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette)

Tune: Forest Green (O little town) 240

O God, your creatures fill the earth with wonder and delight,
And every living thing has worth and beauty in your sight.
So playful dolphins dance and swim; your sheep bow down and graze.
Your songbirds share a morning hymn to offer you their praise.

You made the pets we welcome in— they're wondrous blessings, too.

With paws and whiskers, wings and fins, they offer praise to you.

O Lord, you call us to embrace these creatures in our care.

May we show kindness, love and grace to all pets everywhere.

You made the creatures on each farm; you know the things they need.
May they grow healthy, safe from harm, and safe from human greed.
Just as a shepherd loves the sheep, you know their joy, their pain.
Lord, bless the animals we keep; May all farms be humane.

Your creatures live in every land; they fill the sky and sea.
O Lord, you give us your command to love them tenderly.
We're called to have dominion here--to care for them always.
By loving creatures you hold dear, we offer you our praise.

Notices

Birthdays and celebrations

Passing the Peace

We offer each other the 'right hand of fellowship' as a sign that all are welcome and accepted by God.

Song: If I were a butterfly

Kids Box

(pictures of animals to cut out)

Bible Reading 1: The story of the talking donkey: Numbers 22:22-35
(Dramatic, in 4 voices)

Bible Reading 2: Matthew 6:24-34

Reflection

Offering

Dedication of the offering *(please stand)*

Prayer for the feast day of St Francis

Let us pray. Most high, omnipotent good Lord, grant your people grace to renounce gladly the vanities of this world; that, following the way of blessed Francis, we may for love of you delight in your whole creation with perfectness of joy. O God, you have made us and all living things. You are even more wonderful than what you have made. We thank you for giving us these pets who bring us joy. As you take care of us, so also we ask your help that we might take care of those who trust us to look after them. By doing this, we share in your own love for all creation. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Closing Prayer

Lord of all creation, we pray for the world and all living things

All life is your design; your breath is life for all.

We pray for the wild things, creatures of sea and air and land
and we confess that we humans have damaged so much of the world

Protect the wild and beautiful places, Lord, and all who live in them.

We pray for the animals who share our homes, those we choose and those
we do not choose.

Bless our pets, O God; thank you for their love.

We pray for working animals, for guide dogs and police dogs and farm dogs,
for the hens who lay our eggs and the cows who give us milk.

Bless and protect the animals that serve us in so many ways.

We pray for the tiny animals and the large ones, those we see and those we
don't, for all are part of God's vastly complex creation, and all have a place.

Thank you for our place in your creation, Lord.

Make us good companions to the animals of the earth. Amen.

Closing Hymn: All creatures of our God and King

Blessing

Our God is a wonder-working God! The astonishing diversity of living things
each reflect God's beauty and grace. May you too reflect God's beauty and
grace as you work and rest and play.

Our God is a God of love. As the animals in our lives love with dedication
may we also love God and love others with all our hearts.

Our God is a God of peace. Go in peace, in the company of the Spirit.

Amen, amen, amen (sung)

Please remain standing as the Bible is processed out.

*Thank you for sharing in worship this morning. Please come through to the
hall for morning tea.*

The funny story about the holy man and his donkey: Numbers 22

Once upon a time, back in the day, the 12 tribes of Israel were settling in the land of Israel after they had escaped from Egypt. The king across the River Jordan, which back then was called Moab and these days is called the Kingdom of Jordan, well back then, just like now, he wasn't very happy about Israel and felt threatened. He had his armies but he was nervous. So he decided that what he needed was a curse. He wanted to put a curse on Israel to make them weak so he could defeat them. He had heard about a holy man far far up in the north – someone called Balaam, who apparently was a man of great spiritual power, the power to bless or to curse. So the king of Moab sent messengers all the way to the far far north, way up to Syria by the Euphrates river, to ask this Balaam to come to Moab. He promised to pay him lots of money! Well at first Balaam said no, but then he said yes, and off they went.

²² God was angry that Balaam was going, and as Balaam was riding along on his donkey, accompanied by his two servants, the angel of the LORD stood in the road to bar his way. ²³ When the donkey saw the angel standing there holding a sword, it left the road and turned into the fields. Balaam beat the donkey and brought it back onto the road. ²⁴ Then the angel stood where the road narrowed between two vineyards and had a stone wall on each side. ²⁵ When the donkey saw the angel, it moved over against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against it. Again Balaam beat the donkey. ²⁶ Once more the angel moved ahead; he stood in a narrow place where there was no room at all to pass on either side. ²⁷ This time, when the donkey saw the angel, it lay down. Balaam lost his temper and began to beat the donkey with his stick. ²⁸ Then the LORD gave the donkey the power of speech, and it said to Balaam,

Donkey: "What have I done to you? Why have you beaten me these three times?"

²⁹ Balaam, "Because you have made a fool of me! If I had a sword, I would kill you."

³⁰ Donkey, "Aren't I the same donkey on which you have ridden all your life?"

Balaam: "Yes"

Donkey: "And have I ever treated you like this before?"

Balaam: "No"

³¹ Then the LORD let Balaam see the angel standing there with his sword; and Balaam threw himself face downward on the ground. ³² The angel demanded,

Angel: “Why have you beaten your donkey three times like this? I have come to bar your way, because you should not be making this journey. ³³ But your donkey saw me and turned aside three times. If it hadn't, I would have killed you and spared the donkey.”

³⁴ Balaam, “I have sinned. I did not know that you were standing in the road to oppose me; but now if you think it is wrong for me to go on, I will return home.”

³⁵ But the angel said,

Angel: “Go on with these men, but say only what I tell you to say.”

So Balaam went on with them.

When they got to Moab, the king took him up to a lookout across the river to see the camps of the people of Israel. ‘Come on then, I’m paying you well, said the King, ‘Curse these people!’

But Balaam prayed to God, and asked God what to say, and God gave him a prophecy of blessing instead of curse.

So Balaam pronounced:

How can I curse what God has not cursed?

The people of Israel are blessed more than other nations.

¹⁰ **The descendants of Israel are like the dust—**

There are too many of them to be counted.

The LORD their God is with them;

They proclaim that he is their king.

²³ **There is no magic charm or witchcraft,**

that can be used against them.^[a]

²⁴ **The nation of Israel is like a mighty lion!**

Whoever blesses Israel will be blessed,

And whoever curses Israel will be cursed.”

Well, as you can imagine that didn't go down very well with the king of Moab. So Balaam and his donkey set off again on the long journey back to the north, back home, without getting paid after all.

Sermon on Balaam's donkey

Silvia Purdie, Cashmere Presbyterian Church, 8 Oct 2017

Let's all find Numbers 22 in our pew Bibles. Has anyone read Numbers anytime recently? Can't say I have. Perhaps we should all remind ourselves of the books of the Bible. The top 5 for Jews, called the Torah, the books of Moses, the first 5 books?

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

These 5 books are the pre-history of Israel, the stories from Mesopotamia in the north, Egypt in the south, the wilderness and the desert, of a people chosen by God, formed by God in these other places, and brought by God to this place, the land of Israel.

By Numbers 22 the people are where – can someone read verse 1?

... describe

the land of Jordan. and the King of Jordan wants to get them off his land but he is nervous about them and doesn't want to attack them directly. so he sends for Balaam the holy man and wants to buy a curse off him. And we have heard how that story didn't work out very well for him at all.

But we're ready this story today because of one most curious character in the story – Balaam's donkey.

Hands up if you knew that the Bible contained a talking donkey!?

The story tells us 6 things about this donkey

1. He was a faithful donkey, normally a most reliable beast of burden and means of transport for Balaam
2. He was an old donkey, having carried Balaam for many years
3. He saw the angel. God came down in the form of a spiritual being and the donkey saw it when the Holy man did not!
4. The donkey chose evasive action! The donkey didn't just turn around and run away, the donkey did all it could to warn Balaam, in order to save his life.
5. The donkey did not appreciate being beaten up, and wanted to say so! He had every right to complain!

6. He was amazingly forgiving, and set off again uncomplaining once Balaam had sorted it out with the angel.

I think this is a rather adorable story, particularly notable in that Balaam himself was a Gentile, a foreigner, a Syrian, who the Bible describes as knowing and talking with God, Yahweh the Lord, and acting as a mouthpiece of God. There are other non-Jews whom God uses in various ways, but this I think is the only non-Jewish prophet of God in the Old Testament, and so a fascinating model for how God's Spirit works through all peoples in the New Testament.

But anyway, that is not my topic this morning. We are today talking about the animals, and their importance in God's creation and in our lives. And this is actually an enormous topic and one that we must come back to again. But for now, let's stay with Balaam's donkey and listen to what he has to say, because it's not often that what animals are saying to us gets translated so bluntly into human language. I mean, those of us with pets know mostly what they are saying to us

but even though Balaam had known this donkey for years and years he really didn't get what the donkey was trying to say. So God gave the donkey a helping hand, the power of human speech, for just a couple of minutes. Apparently. Or perhaps God gave Balaam the power to understand the braying of the donkey. Either way, they understood each other and that is one of the things that the Spirit of God does, helping us to hear and understand each other. Praise God for that.

But I wonder if we can stretch this story out a bit, or maybe quite a lot, so that the donkey might stand-in for all of the created world. Do you think perhaps that this donkey might speak for all donkeys, all animals in fact? Because this is the way the Bible works, you know. All of it is both from one time and place AND alive for all times and all places. Not in a literal this equals that kind of way, but in the ways of metaphors and models, so that this small story is a microcosm for the macro story.

Anyway. So, there they are, walking along the path, and 3 times the donkey sees an angel barring the path and 3 times he takes evasive action and 3 times he gets beaten for it. Then the donkey complains:

Why are you beating me?! Haven't I carried you all these years?

Can't you just hear the cry of all the earth in those words!

Isn't the whole planet saying to us humans right now

Why are you beating me?! Haven't I carried you all these years?

I would like you to talk to your neighbour about this.

What are the ways that humans have been beating and abusing the earth? What most troubles you?

... feedback

What happens next in the story? Can someone read verses 31 to 33

Wow. God speaks, through this angel, and God is not happy with Balaam. Balaam gets soundly told off for being abusive to his donkey, but also for not taking notice of the warnings that he was going the wrong way.

When I read those words from the angel they struck me as being the same thing that the scientists are saying to us today.

Why are we abusing the planet, it is just trying to warn us that we are going the wrong way? If we keep going we could die – to put it bluntly.

Can I ask you to talk to your neighbour again, perhaps turn the other way to talk to someone else. And here's your question. I'm afraid it is not an easy question:

What is God saying to us about our relationship with creation? Is God talking to us through the animals? through the storms? through the scientists? What might God be saying to us?

... feedback

In our story from Numbers 22 Balaam repented "I am sorry". Balaam realized that the donkey could see more of God than he could, and he respected his donkey for that. He bowed down, falling on his face. He surrendered his plans, his desire for the financial pay-out of his trip. He let it all go before God, and found in himself a place of simple obedience to God. And out of that God was able to speak through him. The prophecies which Balaam went on to say are some of scriptures astonishing words about the importance of the people of Israel, but also Balaam prophesied the Messiah,

In Numbers 24 Balaam described himself as one who falls down, with eyes uncovered. And he prophesies (Number 24:6-7) of Israel

Like palm groves that stretch far away,
like gardens beside a river,
like aloes that the LORD has planted,
like cedar trees beside the waters.

⁷Water shall flow from his buckets,
and his seed shall have abundant water,
his king shall be higher than Agag,
and his kingdom shall be exalted.

This prophecy applies also to us, who in Christ are part of his kingdom, under this King, the Messiah, Jesus. We are part of the outflowing of spiritual water, like seeds planted beside the river.

And yet even as we read this beautiful words and know their spiritual truth, we are confronted by the harsh reality that water is becoming so rare in our world. The land of Moab, where this prophecy was spoken, is getting drier and drier. And a result of global warming is that when rain falls it falls too much, so land floods and winds destroy.

Balaam the holy man warns us even as he was warned, to listen to the donkey, to listen to our earth, to stop in our tracks, to turn around in our headlong careering towards destruction.

I am going to pause again, this time to give you time to pray. In this quiet moment we offer our own prayers of confession, for our part in damaging creation, and praying for our part in listening to God, listening to creation.