

# “All Creatures of Our God”

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*First Presbyterian Church  
Wilkes-Barre, PA  
Numbers 22:22-35  
Genesis 8:6-12  
Isaiah 11:1-9*

First, I apologize to the person who thoughtfully emailed this material to me. Please feel free to remind me. By the way this is not a joke. Apparently not all churches see eye to eye within communities. In one community on the church sign beautifully displayed on the front lawn at “Our Lady of Martyrs Catholic Church” was an inspiring message – “All dogs Go to Heaven.”

The following week apparently the neighboring Beulah Cumberland Presbyterian church responded on their church sign. “Only Humans go to Heaven, Read the Bible” “Our Lady of Martyrs Catholic Church” I guess felt it had to continue the “dialogue.” It’s next sign read, “God Loves all his Creatures, Dogs included.” I say amen to “Our Lady of Martyrs Catholic Church” on this one, sorry Presbyterians. (Oh, you can see the signs on the Fellowship Hall’s bulletin board.)

Now, speaking about Presbyterians and dogs, there was this Presbyterian family that was very strong in their faith, of course, who isn’t? They decided they wanted a pet. The one requirement was the pet had to be a devoted Presbyterian also! So one day they drove to the pet store where they proceeded to ask the owner, “Do you have any Presbyterian dogs for sale, by any chance?” Surprised by the question, the pet shop owner looked around his shop and thought about it for a while and finally nodded, saying, “Wait...a...minute...yes, I think we just might have a dog that could fit your description.” The owner walks over to a group of cages and brings out a small dog to the family, and the father says, “We need to see if this is a real Presbyterian dog.” So the father says to the dog, “Go find a Bible.” Unbelievably the dog runs out of the pet store, down the street, and into a church...returning with...of all things a Bible in its mouth! He runs up to the family and plops down the bible at their feet. Genuinely impressed, the father continues, “Let’s see if this dog knows the books of the Bible, turn to the book of Psalms,” he commands the dog. The dog immediately opens the bible with its snout and paws to the Psalms. Very pleased they purchase the dog, and take it home.

Proud of their dog they show him off to friends. At one point the friends say, “Nice! But, can it do any other tricks that normal dogs do?” The Presbyterian father wondered and said, “Hmm, I don’t know. Let’s see.” He orders the dog, “Heel.” Suddenly the dog leaps onto the father’s lap and places its paw on the man’s head and starts to pray. “Wait a minute!” exclaims the friend of the family, “That dog isn’t Presbyterian! It’s Pentecostal!”

In my professional opinion, all animals are non-denominational and heaven would not be heaven without our pets. I’ll leave the logistics up to God.

This morning I have chosen three Biblical texts that contain God’s creatures acting in some capacity in telling a story. God’s creatures move throughout the Biblical narrative. They are so present, we often neglect seeing them, (the forest for the trees thing). The first story is really interesting.

In ancient times there is this prophet for hire, a non-Israelite by the name of Balaam. The Moabites are concerned about the Israelites' numbers and strength, so Balaam is hired to curse them. Well the God of Israel lets him know this is not to happen. But Balaam appears to be trying to play both sides. Here is where we pick up the story.

Balaam, on his merry way is about to get himself killed by the angel of the Lord – for Balaam the seer doesn't see the avenging angel, but the donkey, the animal he is riding does! So the donkey does his best to keep out of the way of that big sword! Balaam gets mad at the donkey, and even strikes the animal.

At this point the Lord allows the donkey to speak, “Balaam why do you strike me?” Balaam - “Because of your behavior! I wish I had a sword, I would kill you right now!” Donkey “Haven't I always been of help to you? Have I every behaved like this before?”

Then the Lord opened the eyes of the seer, the prophet and he saw what his donkey saw – the avenging angel with the sword – ready to slay Balaam if he would have passed by.

The animal saved his life. (Sometimes animals have more sense than some humans.)

I recently read about Leila. She is 59 and retired. Her mother passed away and Leila's family lives in another city. She has always had either a cat or a dog. Recently while going to hang clothes on the line, her cats (seven of them) lay in a circle in front of her and refused to move as she continued to shoo them away. She finally looked down and was about to step on a snake, which she has an uncontrollable fear of. They got a lot of loving, and she writes they are her angels on earth.

You all know the story of Noah and the ark. How God told Noah that a great flood was coming, and he needed to build an ark and place his family and the animals in it.

Noah completes his task. The ark's door is shut. The floodwater comes. Forty days and forty nights. At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark and sent out a raven, and then a dove. At one point another dove was sent, and it returned with a “freshly plucked olive leaf,” and this told Noah the waters had subsided from the earth! Hope! Deliverance! Renewal! The Dove returned with life! Another Dove was sent and did not return – for it found a place to rest, to live – restoration – life – renewal!

Rose-Marie had a black, tan and white collie mixed breed, Teddy. To Rose-Marie she was an exceptional beauty. They were best friends and companions for 15 yrs. She never doubted that Teddy would give her life for her without hesitation. She felt her paltry human love could not equal Teddy's unequivocal devotion. Rose-Marie always felt “My dog and I are completely bonded.” But she had no idea how true this was until she was diagnosed with cancer. Through the stages of Rose-Marie's recovery from three operations Teddy stayed near her, sleeping beside the bed, watching every move.

Then came the chemotherapy. On the good advice of a cancer nurse, she had her hair cut short at the start of the treatment. Over a three-week period, handfuls of hair separated from her itchy scalp. Each loss brought her greater distress. Her copying skills quickly eroded. One evening, she sat in her rocking chair, pulling tufts of hair sobbing energetically. Teddy lay on the floor beside her and watched intently. Suddenly Teddy began to pull on her tail. Before Rose-Marie could stop her, she had ripped out a few clumps of hair. The next morning, Teddy had yanked out almost all of the fur from the midsection of her tail, no doubt with considerable pain. Teddy looked up at Rose-Marie as if to say, “If you lose your hair, I'm going to lose mine too.”

Teddy and Rose-Marie both grew back their hair. Rose-Marie went through much pain, but she had her God given companion at her side. Restoration. Renewal. Hope.

And how about the great passage of Isaiah II? Great works of literature have referenced this passage. Great works of art have painted its futuristic, hopeful themes of a peaceable Kingdom. Where the wolf shall swell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

I love this story.

Kerri has 10 pets. One of them is her pet cat, Ariel. She also has a blue and gold Macaw, Pongo. The two of them keep their distance. Once when Kerri was leaving on vacation, she arranged for Pongo to spend two weeks at First Flight, a local bird store that accepts boarders. Kerri always used a large cat carrier to transport Pongo outside the house. Well, she put the carrier on the kitchen counter and went into the living room to get Pongo. He walked readily into the carrier. She latched the door, placed it in the car and off they went.

On the half hour trip Pongo peered around, chewed a little on the plastic and held onto Kerri's finger with his claw. No squawks. No complaints. They arrived at the pet store. She opened the carrier – Pongo walked out – a little quicker than usual. They settled him in his cage, and she picked up the carrier to leave. It was still heavy. She looked inside. Ariel, her cat peered out at her. Ariel had climbed in earlier when in the kitchen. For 15 miles neither Pongo, nor Ariel made a sound. No biting, no clawing – not a single feather or drop of blood was shed.

Who would have believed it? No one in the store did.

By the way when Kerri picked Pongo up two weeks later he did pause and look into the carrier before he got in. Kerri says, "He may be a bird, but he is not a birdbrain."

The Isaiah text is one of many that speaks of a hopeful future where God's creation will be set right, where destruction, pain, killing, will cease, where redemption will replace this world of hurt and betrayal.

Pongo and Ariel for 15 miles mimicked what will be – what we hope will be in the sense of a peaceable Kingdom, where justice covers the whole earth.

Where in God's creation "The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox... They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the seas"

All creatures of our God, are included and involved...

Amen.