

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House
Sunday, August 01, 2010
New York City
www.janhus.org

All God's Creatures
©2010 Ray Bagnuolo

Following the attack on New York City in 2001, the great tragedy of that day and its aftermath brought much of the world to us in unconditional support of the United States of America. For a moment in time, we as a people and a nation had the chance to rise above belligerence and testosterone to embrace the nations of the world and lead in a powerfully peaceful and measured response. Yes, I believe that in that brief window of time we had the chance to take a different path, unlike the path we chose of wars and suspicions.

The reaction.
The response.

It is these that I watch for, in myself. Perhaps you watch for it, as well, in your lives.

When I greet *life* with the "long view," with patience, tolerance, love, understanding, serenity, joy, gratitude; when I hold onto these in my engagement of *life* – despite the situation or conditions – I am most who I wish to be; I am closest to the unconditional love and unwavering trust naturally and freely given by the animals here today and those we remember from other times in our lives.

We should always behave, as well.

At the most difficult times of my life, I have taken great comfort in the pets I have cared for. It is no accident that many of the hospitals and schools I have worked in have introduced visits by different animals for the very spirit and comfort they bring to others. These animals, all of them, seem to have the ability to absorb from us the edginess or *worse* that we know, and replace it with calm and serenity, bring out the best of our own humanness.

I remember Muffins, an Old English sheepdog I once had. She knew when things were off and with all the playfulness and great mass at her possession, she'd leap from a distance onto the couch or the chair where I was sitting - right into my lap, almost as if her great humor and energy knocked me off my perch of disappointment or distress. Nuzzling and licking and knocking me down, soon, I would be laughing and playing with her, the troubles at hand replaced with the great wonder and energy of God in Muffins and all creatures.

We live in a world of great need, and the unique gifts of our pets draw us into their seemingly limitless empathy, joy, and friendship. And, somehow, I don't know how, these creatures make us better people.

Today's reading of *The Prayer of St. Frances*, filled with the aspirations of unconditional love;

the promise of Jesus in the reading of *Matthew*, with cosmic assurance that we have nothing to worry about

are mystically present through these and the other creatures of this world.

For those of us who have before or now offer homes and care for animals, we know they are family. And as with any family, their presence influences us. What could be better than to grow in the kindness and love of these amazing creations of God in all her majesty!

So, let's follow their lead this morning. Let's see in each of them the assurance that we can approach life with the lift of timeless joy, the wag of a tail (theirs or ours), the nuzzle of trust that tells us *not to worry, that we're being taken care of*, and the deep wisdom that tells us their God and Ours, touches us both.

It would surely be good to strive to approach life with the core of such warmth and steadfast love as present in those we will bless this morning. If we continue to try such a thing, there's a good chance the world of *All God's Creatures, Great and Small* will, indeed, be a much better place.

Let it be so.



Blessing of the Animals

When we bless, in scriptural terms, we are imparting the power of life, mediating that power – a conduit – from the God we know and knows us – to others. What a blessing!

Today's blessing of each animal by name, means that health, healing and life are being channeled through us from God for the benefit of the animal and its relationship with its human partners.

*It is the **Shalom** we know.*