

**Sermon – Let Us Be Brave****Scripture – Proverbs 12:10; Ecclesiastes 3:18-21; Philippians 4:4-7****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: October 20, 2019**

---

The practice where religious communities offer a blessing to the animals is a tradition that goes back to 13<sup>th</sup> century Italy and the community that St. Francis of Assisi started. As you know, St. Francis was known for his profound humility that led to a voluntary poverty and a deep relationship with the natural world. At a time when religion was shut away in ornate and imposing structures and nature was demeaned as part of the fallen world, St. Francis taught and preached that nature was a mirror of God.

He emphasized as the holy scriptures that all creatures and elements of creation praise God in their very being and he called the animals his brothers and sisters, referring to the sun and the moon as siblings of the earth. It was said that he preached to the birds in the forest and he preached to his fellow people that they had a duty to protect creation and love creation and be stewards of what God had created. 700 years later we still need his words, we still need his spirit! Supposedly the very first crèche at Christmas time was created by Francis himself as way to draw into the story of Jesus' birth the presence and awareness of the animals who also paid homage to Jesus.

One of the more famous stories that circulated about Francis was his interceding for an Italian town called Gubbio which was being harassed by a wolf who was eating all their livestock. St. Francis, it was said, was troubled by the situation and went out to the forest to meet

the wolf. When he came back to the town he invited the townsfolk to feed the wolf on a daily basis on the outskirts of town and the wolf would leave their animals alone.

Carlo Carretto was a writer in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century who wrote a famous book about St. Francis called "I, Francis". He puts into words what he imagined St. Francis would have explained about the encounter:

No, brothers and sisters I was not afraid to meet the wolf. Not since I had experienced the fact that my God is the wolf's God too. I do not believe that the wolf grew tame so much as the people of Gubbio grew tame. They finally ran to meet the hungry wolf not with pruning knives and hatchets but with bread and hot porridge. This is the miracle of love, to discover that all creation is one, flung out into space by a God who is a loving parent God. If we present ourselves peaceably, without fear, creation will respond in kind. This is why I, Francis, went out that morning to meet the wolf with a smile. By conquering myself, I conquered the wolf. By taming my own evil instincts I tamed that of the wolf. By making an effort to trust the wolf, I found that the wolf trusted me. Perhaps you are listening to me, someone out there. Whoever it is, I, Francis say, be brave!

That is a good word for us today, BE BRAVE, by being peaceable to others and working to conquer the enemy within us rather than fearing those around us. And we learn from St. Francis how important it is to be peaceable not just to the human other but to the animal other and even the inanimate other.

So let us be peaceable to our animal siblings, not just the ones we take care of in our homes, of course them, but the ones who share our little patches of land that we claim as our own; brother chipmunk, sister

squirrel, and our sibling birds. And let us be peaceable not just to the animals we share ground with but those who come from other patches of land where factory farms use too much violence and too little compassion to bring us cheap animal products. Let us be brave and eat with a renewed consciousness towards being more peaceable and less violent, like good St. Francis acting as stewards not consumers of God's good earth. Let us be brave and note the love and care we feel for our pets and our family and then consider how we extend our loving care out from our inner circles to those humans and animals and creatures beyond those circles. Could that be part of why we are here to extend those circles of love and grace and healing out from smaller arcs to wider and more inclusive sweeps.

We all know there is a counter movement afoot to make the arcs of love and care smaller and smaller, to build walls of exclusion, to decrease our protections of certain parts of the earth, to increase our consumption of violently farmed animals, that is why it is important that we are instruments of an alternative sweep that moves outward in gentler and more loving ways. What does that look like in your life? Can you hear your dog calling you to that not just for him or her but for all animal life? May this time of blessing also bless us so that our lives can be a move out in concert with St. Francis' to be a blessing to others, in Jesus' name, Amen!