

**Reading**

by Robin Gray

Ben

When I grow up, I want to be wise and kind.  
 When I grow up, I want to be a friend to all –  
 People, animals, and Earth.  
 May I begin to grow up now.

**Story**from *Blessing of the Animals* by Gary Kowalski

Tiff Bohn

One spring... our Adult Education Committee sponsored a program featuring the therapy dogs of Vermont. We had three German Shepherds upstairs along with Steven Reiman their trainer, who takes the dogs into pediatric wards around the state, where there are children who are sick or gravely injured. One of those youngsters was a fourteen-year-old girl who had been helicoptered into our regional medical center from New York when an aneurysm ruptured inside her brain. She'd arrived on a Friday night and the following Wednesday she was still in a coma, unconscious and unresponsive to the world around. Nothing the doctors tried seemed to be able to bring her back to life. Her mother had briefly gone out of the hospital room to grab a bite to eat when Steve happened to stop in with his therapy dogs. By the time Mom came back, her daughter had risen from the bed and was lounging in a chair, smiling and looking cheerfully around the room. What had happened? One of the dogs had actually hopped up into bed with the girl and sprawled across her chest. Maybe the pooch even applied a little miracle dog slobber to her face. But as soon as the girl felt the weight of the dog and the soft fur tickling her skin, her arms, which had lain limp and unmoving for over five days, lifted and encircled that big friendly mutt. It was an act of pure puppy love that did what modern medicine couldn't. How do you explain it? Without words, animals open us to realities that mysteriously transform us. And if it's true that "those who abide in love abide in God," then animals bring our spirits into closer communion with the Maker of life's intimate, tender dimensions. <sup>i</sup>

**Reading***Anonymous*

Alex

He knows when you're happy  
 He knows when you're comfortable  
 He knows when you're confident  
 And he always knows when you have carrots.

**Story***The Creation of Pets ~Anonymous*

Pam Fodor

It is reported that the following edition of the Book of Genesis was discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls. If authentic, it would shed light on the question, "Where do pets come from?"

And Adam said, "World, when I was in the garden, you walked with me every day. Now I do not see you anymore. I am lonesome here and it is difficult for me to remember how much you love me." And God said, "No problem! I will create a companion for you that will be with you forever and who will be a reflection of my love for you, so that you will know I love you even when you cannot see me. Regardless of how selfish and childish and unlovable you may be, this new companion will accept you as you are and will love you as I do, in spite of yourself." And God created a new animal to be a companion for Adam. And it was a good animal. And God was pleased. And the new animal was pleased to be with Adam and he wagged his tail. And Adam said, "But World, I

have already named all the animals in the Kingdom and all the good names are taken and I cannot think of a name for this new animal.” And God said, “No problem!” Because I have created this new animal to be a reflection of my love for you, his name will be a reflection of my own name, and you will call him DOG.” And Dog lived with Adam and was a companion to him and loved him. And Adam was comforted. And God was pleased. And Dog was content and wagged his tail. After a while, it came to pass that Adam's guardian angel came to the World and said, “World, Adam has become filled with pride. He struts and preens like a peacock and he believes he is worthy of adoration. Dog has indeed taught him that he is loved, but no one has taught him humility.” And the World said, “No problem! I will create for him a companion who will be with him forever and who will see him as he is. The companion will remind him of his limitations, so he will know that he is not worthy of adoration.” And God created CAT to be a companion to Adam. And Cat would not obey Adam. And when Adam gazed into Cat's eyes, he was reminded that he was not the Supreme Being. And Adam learned humility. And God was pleased. And Adam was greatly improved. And Cat didn't give a damn one way or the other. <sup>ii</sup>

### **Reading**

by Lynn Warren

Briana

Praise God for the animals  
For the colors of them,  
For the spots and stripes of them,  
For the patches and plains of them,  
Their claws and paws.

### **Reading & Message**

The Judgment of the Birds by Loren Eisley

Rev Pam

“The sun was warm there, and the murmurs of forest life blurred softly away into my sleep. When I awoke, dimly aware of some commotion and outcry in the clearing, the light was slanting down through the pines in such a way that the glade was like some vast cathedral. I could see the dust motes of wood pollen in the long shaft of light, and there on the extended branch sat an enormous raven with a red and squirming nestling in his beak.

The sound that awoke me was the outraged cries of the nestlings parents, who flew helplessly in circles about the clearing. The sleek black monster was indifferent to them. He gulped, whetted his beak on the dead branch a moment and sat still. Up to that point the little tragedy had followed the usual pattern. But suddenly, out of all that area of woodland, a soft sound of complaint began to rise. Into the glade fluttered small birds of half a dozen varieties drawn by the anguished outcries of the tiny parents.

No one dared to attack the raven. But they cried there in some instinctive common misery, the bereaved and the unbereaved. The glade filled with their soft rustling and their cries. They fluttered as though to point their wings at the murderer. There was a dim intangible ethic he had violated, that they knew. He was a bird of death.

And he, the murderer, the black bird at the heart of life, sat on there, glistening in the common light, formidable, unmoving, unperturbed, untouchable.

The sighing died. It was then I saw the judgment. It was the judgment of life against death. I will never see it

again so forcefully presented. I will never hear it again in notes so tragically prolonged. For in the midst of protest, they forgot the violence. There, in that clearing, the crystal note of a song sparrow lifted hesitantly in the hush. And finally, after painful fluttering, another took the song, and then another, the song passing from one bird to another, doubtfully at first, as though some evil thing were being slowly forgotten. Till suddenly they took heart and sang, from many throats joyously together as birds are known to sing. They sang because life is sweet and sunlight beautiful. They sang under the brooding shadow of the raven. In simple truth they had forgotten the raven, for they were the singers of life, and not of death.<sup>iii</sup>”

**This is a special day in the rhythm of the church year.** For one day, we can bring not only our human families, but also our animal family members. Not only the ones who can talk to us, but the ones who bark or purr or chirp or merely sit quietly on our shoulder. We take this time to look at our seventh principle from a personal perspective – celebrating the interconnected web of all beings and taking a moment to pause, in gratitude, for the richness and depth and life that animals add to our lives.

Albert Schweitzer is quoted as saying that human ethics have not been complete because they failed to ask the most important question: “**what is [man’s] attitude to the world and all life that comes within his reach?**” He says we are “ethical only when life, as such, is sacred .., and that of plants and animals as that of [our] fellow men”, when we devote ourselves as helpfully to all life. “The ethic of Reverence for Life, therefore, comprehends within itself everything that can be described as love, devotion, and sympathy whether in suffering, joy, or effort.”

Reverence for Life: Today we are paying attention to that ever-widening circle of life and looking at how we all fit together. We’ve heard stories and readings looking at animals from all different perspectives; animals who work with us as therapy dogs and helpers, animals as a source of understanding our relationship with the world.

Animals are friends, teachers, companions, and for many of us, sustenance. Most of the people in the US are omnivores which mean even as we love our animal companions, we will eat just about everything, including a lot of chickens, cows, and pigs. So we stop and ask: How does that reality fit into a day celebrating and blessing animals?

I remember a friend of mine was driving in the country with her son, who was then about six. He was asking where things came from and she was pointing out the cornfields and saying that’s where corn on the cob comes from, and the sheep in the field saying that’s where they got cloth for his clothes.

But when he suddenly asked where hamburgers come from, she hesitated. She asked him – Tom, do you like cows? When he said yes, she said “hamburgers come from the grocery store.”

Now I was pretty irked by this story. It’s funny, and I knew he would figure it out eventually, but it represents our cultures refusal to acknowledge unpleasant realities of life. And because we won’t look at things squarely, we can’t make intentional choices about how to live in relationship with the other life on the planet. It’s not that we have to choose one way or another, but that we have to be mindful of our choices. Mindful of how our choices affect the planet, mindful of the suffering we may be causing to other beings.

Now I have certainly eaten a lot of animals in my life. My mom has been raising chickens for a long time and I never felt bad about eating those eggs. Her chickens have a really good life – they get to wander about eating bugs and fresh stuff out of the grass, she’s always bringing them special chicken treats, and she’s vigilant about protecting them from the raccoons.

She'd get a new batch of chicks each spring and when we were younger, we knew that in the fall she would be culling off the new roosters and we'd have some delicious paprikas for dinner – and we were pretty happy about that. It meant we would no longer be being attacked by those roosters who had gotten old enough to want to defend their territory and chase after us in the yard.

I remember one day leaving to go for work and walking backwards down the hill to say goodbye to my mom because she was killing chickens, chopping off their heads and taking out the feathers. I not only wouldn't help, but didn't even want to see what she was doing. So today, much as I love paprikas, I don't make it anymore. I'm not willing to take the life of another creature so I avoid eating them.

Although, I do place a high value on hospitality. If I go to someone's home, and they have prepared a meal with meat, I will share their meal. For me it's all about being in relationship.

Relationship with other people, relationship with other living beings, relationship with the planet.

Today we are celebrating our relationship with all of these critters in the sanctuary. They way they make our lives full and rich – they way they bring us joy and comfort us in our sadness. The way they break our hearts when it's time for them to die. George Carlin once said that every new puppy is a tragedy in the making. In the normal course of things, we will outlive that puppy and we will be incredibly sad at the loss of a good friend and companion.

But it doesn't stop us, because those relationships are so good, so life giving, so generative and just plain fun, that the sadness at parting is worth it. It's the reality of life. We love and we lose. But the loving wins out every time.

Like the birds in Eiseley's story. We are also singers of life. We celebrate the joy, the companionship, the slobbery kisses and the accidental scratches that happen along the way. Life can be hard and sad, but also joyous and full of love – especially with our animal companions – and today we celebrate the whole of it.

Amen & Blessed be.

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<sup>i</sup> Kowalski, Gary (2012-11-01). *Blessings of the Animals: Celebrating Our Kinship with All Creation* (pp. 4-5). Lantern Books. Kindle Edition.

<sup>ii</sup> Kowalski, Gary (2012-11-01). *Blessings of the Animals: Celebrating Our Kinship with All Creation* . Lantern Books. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iii</sup> Eiseley, L. (1959). *The Immense Journey*. New York: Random House, Vintage Books. pp. 173–78.