

**SERMON**  
**“Learning to Talk with the Animals”**  
**Colossians 1:15-23 (MSG)**  
**Sunday, July 31, 2022**

Alice Klatt, a Lutheran pastor from South Carolina, once talked about being vested and ready to greet and bless various pets at a special service in her church’s memorial garden. She reports, *“Major, a handsome Dalmatian, came straight to my side as I ended the service. He leaned against me with obvious affection and I was touched. Then I felt a warmth on my leg and looked down only to realize Major had mistaken me for a fire hydrant.”*

Whether if we are pet lovers or mistaken for fire hydrants, I believe that when God created all the animals of creation; that is; dogs and cats, fish and ferrets, hamsters and parakeets, snakes and rats...God created them to be our companions not our adversaries.

When I preach the creation story from the Book of Genesis, too often I tend to focus more on our origin story: how Adam and Eve; and thus, by association, the rest of humanity fell from grace. The rest of creation becomes nothing more than an afterthought; it’s as if God created everything else just for our benefit; when in truth, God created us male and female to walk with him as companions. And even though we were given dominion over all the other living creatures of creation, we humans must remember that dominion does not mean that we have the right to do to creation whatever we want...but instead we must ‘lead by example;’ that is, as God created us to have companionship with Him, so we as His children must walk in companionship with rest of creation.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Colossians 1:23 that every creature under heaven gets this same message. Theologian Matthew Fox in his book *Original Blessing* speaks of our relationship with creation as a blessing. He writes: *“one does not bless without investing something of oneself into the receiver of one’s blessing. And one does not receive blessing oblivious of its gracious giver. A blessing spirituality is a relating spirituality. And if it is true that all of creation flows from a single, loving source, then all of creation is blessed and is a blessing.”*

So, this morning as we participate in a Blessing of the Animals, I want to address the variety of creatures who have gathered here today. I want to be like one of the characters from the classic movie *Dr. Dolittle* starring Rex Harrison. Like *Dolittle* himself I would love to break out in song singing of the blessings God has blessed each and every one of us with....

*“If we could talk to the animals, learn their languages  
Think of all the things we could discuss  
If we could walk with the animals, talk with the animals,  
Grunt and squeak and squawk with the animals,  
And they could squeak and squawk and speak and talk to us.”*

So, in the spirit of *Dr. Dolittle*, I want to speak with you dogs and cats, ferrets and hamsters, parakeets and snakes brought here today by your human companions. You are here for your own sake, and you also represent all those who are not here today, animals of every kind—cattle and goats and horses and elephants and bees and cougars and crocodiles and puffer fish and eels and insects—so many we cannot name them all.

I want to announce the good news to all you creatures. I want you to know that God loves you. God loves you for your own sake—and not because of what you can do for humans.

You are good in yourselves. The good book tells us that when God created you—fish of the sea and birds of the air and creatures of the land—God looked at all God had created, and God saw that “indeed, it was very good!”

You who are here today are so fortunate because you have human companions who care for you. But so many of your cousins are threatened with extinction—snow leopards and timber wolves and green sea turtles and condors and paddlefish and fin whales among so many others. We humans may so crowd out or deplete these kin of yours that not a single one of them will ever again exist on Earth. When we destroy you and

diminish you in these ways, we not only compromise your ability to survive, we also stifle your capacity; as well as our capacity; to praise God.

Now I want to address you human creatures. I want to announce the good news to us as well. God loves you. God loves you for your own sake and wants you to thrive. When God made you; God saw that you, like the rest of creation, was good. God said also to us: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth." But in so many ways our multiplying and filling, instead of being a blessing, has become a curse! We have become like an infestation—taking over land and destroying habitats. If we could take a page from Dr. Dolittle, and learn to grunt and squeak and squawk with the animals; then they could squeak and squawk and speak and talk to us.

I think that is one reason God chose to bless us with pets; so that we could learn to talk with the animals.

Max Lucado in his book *In the Grip of Grace* tells of a minister whose wife brought home a monkey from the pet store. He said he didn't want a monkey in his house, so he objected.

"Where is he going to eat?" the minister asked.

"At our table," replied his wife.

"Where is he going to sleep?" the minister inquired.

"In our bed," said his wife.

"What about the odor?" the minister demanded.

To which his wife replied; "I got used to you, and I guess the monkey can, too."

Jesus himself, says Colossians, is leading the resurrection parade: *"From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies."*

The author of Colossians reminds us that Jesus died in order that God might reconcile to God's self all things in creation. If a monkey can grow accustomed to the smell of a pastor; then I think, through God's grace, we can learn to love; not just are pets, but all of creation itself.