

In the Eye of a Camel: Blessing of the Animals

20 September 2009

Kirkland Congregational Church

A sermon for children and adults, start with the children at the front. Have the book, The Blessing of the Beasts by Ethel Pochocki in the children's sermon bag.

Ask the kids, "What is your favourite movie?" Wait for the kids to answer.

"Who saw the movie, Wall-E?"

What was Wall-E? [a robot]

At the beginning of the movie, there was only Wall-E, the robot and his little friend, a small insect.

What sort of insect was Wall-E's friend? [cockroach]

*Amongst the books that Gale collects for children's church is this story called, can you read the title? Yes! It is called *The Blessing of the Beasts*.*

What is a beast? [any animal: fish, bird, bug, reptile, or mammal is a beast]

And, what have folks brought to church today?

Why did people bring their pets to church today? Yes! We are blessing the animals, the beasts, in our church today. Because they are an important part of God's creation.

In this story, a church in New York City is going to have a blessing of the animals. Word gets around amongst the animals who live in the neighborhood. Two animals that hear the news are a cockroach and a skunk.

The cockroach is named Francesca, after a Saint. Can you guess which saint? is He is especially remembered because he loved all animals, all beasts, all creatures, great and small...even cockroaches! [Saint Francis]

Who has seen a roach? What color is a roach usually? [brown] Usually St. Francis is pictured in brown robes.

The skunk's name is Martin. He is named after another saint, Saint Martin de Porres who loved-and-looked after poor people.

Who has seen a skunk? What colour is a skunk? St. Martin de Porres was the first black person to become a Saint in the Catholic Church.

Francesca the cockroach and Martin the skunk hear the news of the blessing of the beasts church service. Francesca, the cockroach, wants to go. She has never been blessed. Martin, the skunk does not think this is a good idea. Why might he think it is not such a good idea for a cockroach and skunk to go into the church to get blessed?

Let's look in the book (*page sixteen*) and read what it says:

Martin says, "...I do not think we are meant to be included, Francesca. The blessing is for the respectables, the cute and cuddlies."

Francesca says, "I bet there will be rats and snakes and porcupines. We are as cute as they are."

Gently, Martin says, "We are outcasts, my dear. They will never let us in. Can't you just hear the humans shrieking as we walk down the aisle?"

What would we do if we saw a cockroach right now?!

But Francesca insists that they go to the church and at least see what happens there even if they cannot walk down the aisle. (She seems a bit stubborn just like St. Francis was.)

So Martin the skunk agrees, and gives Francesca the roach a ride to church on his....HEAD—in his ear! But she promises not to tickle!

At the church they see many people, and many other.. beasts, animals. Afraid that they might get stepped on, Francesca the cockroach and Martin the skunk find a place to hide in the flowers at the back of the church. From their hiding place they see many BIG animals enter the church. What animals do you see going to be blessed?

And what animal is the biggest of ALL the land animals? (*There's a picture on page 32*). [Elephant]

The elephant smells something with its LONG... trunk.

What does she smell? [Martin the skunk!]

But rather than scaring Martin away, the elephant says, "*Come, little brother; this is not a day for hiding. Come celebrate with the rest of us. Grab hold of my trunk. Do not be afraid. I will not let you go.*"

So, the elephant, with the skunk rolled high in her trunk, makes her way past the astonished congregation up to the front of the church. Did anyone bring an elephant today? That would be exciting, wouldn't it?!

When all the animals are at the front of the church, the minister says: (p. 32)

Gracious God, we give you thanks for the beauty of the earth and sky and seas, for the songs of birds and the loveliness of flowers, for the wonders of your animal kingdom, and for our brother, Saint Francis, for whom all these exist to praise you.

“Francis shows us that in the light of the eye of a camel is reflected your glory, God.

In the work of the Ladybug is the soul of an artist.”

A ladybug, watching the pageant from the center of a stained glass window, beams with pride.

“So,” says the minister, “all you creatures of the earth, show forth God's glory, now! Live without fear. Go in peace to follow the good road. I bless you and ask you to bless us humans!”

As the minister blesses the animals with the sign of the cross and holy water, he sees the skunk and the cockroach looking down on him from the elephant's trunk. The minister smiles and says, “Even you, Brother Skunk and Sister Cockroach, whom we do not usually embrace, you too have your rightful place. God has brought you here, the least of God's little ones, to the head of the table, and you have behaved as royal heirs beyond reproach.”

...with the elephant, Martin the skunk and Francesca the cockroach lead the animals back down the aisle. All eyes are on them. To the waves of applause, Martin bows humbly, as he imagines Saint Francis would do, but Francesca the cockroach waves and blows kisses, for she is, after all, a roach beyond reproach.

At the great door of the church, the elephant lowers his trunk, and Martin returns to solid ground. Francesca and Martin thank the elephant for giving them the best seat in the house. The elephant blinks his wise eyes and snorts softly, “Do not mention it. It was my pleasure.”

We do not have any elephants, roaches or skunks here today, but each of our animals, big or small, reminds us of God. They bless us. In their eyes, as in the eye of the camel, we see the eye of God. In their variety we see God's creativity and humor. In their gentleness and excitement, we see God's Spirit. Truly, we are blessed by their presence with us today.

Let us pray. There is a prayer in the bulletin I would like to invite everyone to pray aloud together.

[God thank you for all the beasts of creation – roaches, skunks and elephants, and everything in between. Amen.]

You can return to your families or sit in the front row—the best seats in the house-- to watch as Ben and Joanne bless our animals with water and a prayer.