

19th Sunday After Pentecost + Blessing of the Animals

Philippians 3

Matthew 21.33-46

Rev'd Jamee Callard

(Transcript taken from YouTube)

Good Tenants

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

The gospel today is the parable of the bad tenants. And Jesus tells a story about these bad tenants who killed and mistreated the slaves and then the son of the vineyard owner when they came to collect what was due at rent time.

Now, it's very easy to apply this parable to our care for creation at the close of this season of creation and how we treat God's beloved creatures as those who have been given a responsibility to love and protect all that has been made.

Jesus' parable encourages us to reflect on how the bad tenants distorted their role and their rightful duty and would be justly punished by the landlord and their tenancy then given to others who would do a better job, make the land well and fruitful, remembering that it does not belong to them.

Now, I wonder where did the landowner find such good tenants? Where were these good people? Who were they?

Now in context, Jesus was warning the religious leaders of his day and his own faith community about how they were failing in their care of the household of God and their outward call of being a light to the nations. And they took offense to this warning.

Now, if we heard the same lesson in our context, would we members of a religious community react by taking offense or by taking heed?

Something to ponder.

Well, St. Francis of Assisi, a holy hermit, religious reformer and founder, is the example of a loving servant of creation who we remember widely in the church today with animal blessing services around the communion.

As well as constantly seeking to bring people back to faithful relationship with God when they'd gone their own way, often rebuking corrupt church practices and leadership. St. Francis also said,

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"If you have men who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will deal likewise with their fellow men." Now, that seems to feed right into reflecting on the parable today, as well as St. Francis's other legacies as patron sainted animals.

In other stories of his life, we hear that he talked to the animals as equals, preached sermons to the birds, and he always sought protection for animals at risk.

He related to nature as family, brother, son, and sister moon being one of his famous canticle parables.

I've always felt that the way that people talk about and to animals says a lot. And not just the cute ones either.

How do you talk to a creepy crawly or something venomous that surprises you when you don't expect it? Do you call them sibling or something else?

But we can take encouragement from St. Francis's example, but also from one another's examples in this community where we have such an active companion animal ministry and many of our people's hearts beat for creation and all God's creatures. We can reflect on what kind of tenants we are at Holy Hermits online.

One such servant of God who we mourn today, our beloved Liz was a prime example of one who took her role seriously when it came to the care of animals and their welfare.

Not only did she devote herself to caring for her close companions and feline friends, Lily being the most recent, but she sewed for rescue organizations who foster Aussie animals and who have protection following bushfires or loss of habitat or diseases running through the population or other sorts of disasters, often man-made.

So, the amount of baby animals who have been kept warm in one of Liz's Joey pouches over the years probably can't be counted.

Now, we will really miss Liz in our digital spaces where she was a faithful and warm, gentle presence as well as her creative and passionate energy that she offered to ministry in every aspect of her life.

One of the other things that I will treasure is Liz's art that she created using the AI tool Padlet. And these continue to feature in our ministry space. Many of her digital pieces move me deeply and I think do the same for many others. So I give thanks for such a wonderful legacy that we can treasure in our midst for years to come.

One which was one of Liz's more recent ones which she named God's Wondrous Nature I think is really beautiful for today. I'm going to make it my background just briefly. You can't see all of it but it's just such a stunning piece.

May we continue to allow her to move us through these things that she has left with us.

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But now that Liz is at peace, we can draw near to God in our grief, knowing that she's joined that great cloud of witnesses in the heavenly places and is reunited with all of her past furry friends, especially Daisy and Missy, who she had missed terribly after they had gone to heaven.

And we can take heart and inspiration and we will do what Liz would have hoped that we would and pray for animals in general today, but especially for her beloved Lacy as she seeks her next home in the care of the Animal Welfare League.

We can keep striving to live a life closer to God's dream of being good tenants, caring for creation, loving as we are loved, and when we get it wrong, as we will, resting on Jesus' grace and forgiveness to try again and not lose heart. Because unlike the parable of the bad tenants, we are promised not to be cast out, but to be given more opportunities.

And one day we will give an account when the rent is due and trust that with Christ standing beside us, we will be able to forgive ourselves our failures, and inherit the promise of eternal life as citizens of heaven alongside all the saints, St. Francis and Liz included.

To quote our sentence for today from Philippians and to finish off this reflection.

Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, we press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.