

**Rev. George Arceneaux**

**10/08/2023**

## **Pentecost 19 – Blessing of the Animals**

Friends, this morning's Gospel is about murder, betrayal, and judgement. Which is to say, this is a great Sunday for the Blessing of Animals. Now you might say, why George that sounds like an odd pairing I don't see how the Gospel and the theme of the day fit together. And if you said that, I very much appreciate you. Because you're right. But we work with what we have.

But honestly, there is wisdom to be found between our pets and our gospel, between the wicked tenants and the creatures lovingly brought here today. The story, and the stories involving vineyards and the chief priests and elders, that we have had the last few weeks have generally all been a warning to those in power. That true wealth, true prosperity, is not in the greedy accumulation of goods and worldly power but rather in living a life of love: the kind of love that God held when we were made and when the creatures of this world were made.

Love is at the heart of our Gospel, because that is what Jesus calls those in power to live into. His parables are not merely a threat to the elders and the priests that they better shape up or God's gonna get em... its reminder that they can repent and draw back to the center of the religion they profess. They need not be the tenants of steal and kill in order to rule the vineyard. They can be good stewards.

And racking my brain to figure out where the heck I was going to get an image of why animals fit into that repentance, and I never in million years thought I would be up here preaching on this, but if there is a better image of why our pets matter, why animals matter to humans and our relationship with God's justice, if there's a better image PLEASE let me know after this service. But I keep getting drawn back to Max. You know. The Grinch's dog from [How the Grinch Stole Christmas](#).

Now for anyone that is thinking George, how DARE you bring up anything Christmas related in October, trust me, I am with you, I'm gonna be in mortal combat with Fiona come November 1<sup>st</sup> on playing Mariah Carey and All I Want For Christmas. But I can't think of a better representation of how the animals of our world, our pets particularly, often stand beside us as reminders of God in our lives even as we make mistakes.

I'm going to assume that we all have a passing familiarity with the Grinch, but as a reminder, the story goes that we don't actually *know* why the Grinch who lives north of Whoville hates Christmas a lot. Some said his head wasn't screwed on just right and cother that perhaps his shoes were too tight, but as most of us know the most likely reason of all was likely, most likely that his heart was two sizes too small.

And while the Grinch of the tale is one we remember, but it is Max his dog on which we will linger. Max is right there, right from the start, as we hear of the Grinch and his very small heart. Yet despite Grinch and his malicious mind, Max is always there and seems just so kind.

Alright I'm done. But yeah, we see this story unfold of the Grinch stealing presents from the whos of Whoville and Max is right there with him, trying to be loyal to his master and yet seeming so sweet and not on board with what's happening. And even when I first read the story when I was little, I remember wondering why the Grinch couldn't just look to Max to see that everything he was doing was wrong. This morning I similarly can't quite tell why the tenants steal from the lord and his vineyard, why they are so wicked, we could blame them for their greed or anything else. But as I hold those questions about why the Grinch or these tenants do the evil they do, I think to myself. And the sin that is part of my life. The ways in which I respond unkindly or ungenerously to others. The ways in which I will presume and judge those with different political beliefs, or experiences, those times when I will act selfishly rather than consider the needs of others. And then I think of Bon. My cat who I adopted when he was a kitten in 2011. He's been with me ever since and is now twelve years old. And there are times when I remember... I'm kind of his life. He's been dependent on me for food, shelter, and affection that whole time. And I would be lying if I didn't say I've been dependent on him. For all the failures and mistakes, for all the sins I've committed, this cat reminds me every day that I love him and he loves me. And that I need not be defined by my sins, but rather, that each moment is an opportunity to live in love.

I get in this pulpit, and you will hear me say again and again that we all remind one another of the work of love that God calls us towards. But today, as we bless these animals and bless all animals, I think it's important that Christ is present in every living thing too, in the dogs, and cats, and guinea pigs of our lives. Heck, the memories of the pets we've loved too, I can't step into this space and not remember Cheryl's dog Lil' Willie and of course the workin' dog of Dan and Chris, Emerson. But we can remember today that we can be provoked towards right living the same way that Max serves as a reminder to the Grinch and as Jesus reminds the elders and priests of the work they are called to in their power. Today, look at the pets you have brought, yours or others. And remember that we all live for one another in this world, just as the animals live in this planet for us and for creation. Look to the world around you, even to those things that don't matter, to the rejected cornerstone. Those are the things that will help lead you to love. Amen.