

October 4 Blessing of the Animals Sermon  
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## Scripture

Genesis 1:24-25 (The Inclusive Bible)

24 Then God said, “Earth: bring forth all kinds of living soul—cattle, things that crawl, and wild animals of all kinds!” So it was: 25 God made all kinds of wild animals, and cattle, and everything that crawls on the ground, and God saw that this was good.

Matthew 5:1-9 (NRSV)

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup>Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

3 ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

8 ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

## Sermon - "There are Angels Among Us"

In the spring of 1994 a beautiful thing happened, and I can still only explain it as the visitation of an angel.

My father died that January, and as I got ready to return to college, I worried about my mom being alone. I told my mom she needed a dog, and I recruited friends and relatives to join in the campaign. My mom was resolute, though: she did not have the energy to take care of a dog, she did not want to take on that responsibility, and she was not going to go out looking for a dog.

A little family had just moved in next door: a recently divorced single mom and her boy, Cody.

Now, Cody was the exact opposite of my mom, young, energetic, and totally committed to getting a dog. But Cody's mother had told him, we cannot afford a dog, as much as she wanted a puppy, too.

Well. I am convinced somehow or another that God had a plan for Mom and Cody. My theology doesn't often imagine God intervening on that kind of individual level but I can only understand what happened next as divine activity, even if I can't explain it theologically. Because one day that spring a scruffy looking matted-haired, no-collar dog was sitting along the fence right between our back yards. Cody found him and fell in love. Cody's mom saw my mom out in the front yard. What am I supposed to do, Ms. Kavich, we can't keep this dog?

Mom, being simultaneously practical and a sucker, said, well... the first thing we have to do is feed him, and then take him to the vet and see if he's healthy and see if anyone's reported him missing. I'll take care of that.

So into Mom's car went the dog. The dog, by then, had been named Sparky, by the way.

The vet said, Ms. Kavich, not only is this dog healthy but he's a young adult full bred schnauzer, and it looks like he's well trained. No one's called for him, I'll put up a poster and call the other vets in town. I'll trim off the matts and give him his shots. Can he stay with you until we find his people? Mom allowed as to that being okay by her, *for a few days.*

Of course, no one claimed Sparky. But within a day or two, Cody and mom had a rhythm. Sparky would play all day with the little boy, and then he'd come and curl up on the sofa in the evenings with Mom.

It went on this way for some time.

A year or two later Cody and his mom moved away, but Sparky stayed.

By now, just what you'd imagine: Sparky had won Mom over. Instead of taking energy, he gave her joy. Instead of being a responsibility, he was a blessing. Instead of going looking for a dog, an angel had found his way to her.

He was as loyal a dog as you could imagine. I remember coming home with her one night, with take out roast beef. I walked in with the food, and Mom was behind me. Sparky pushed right past me to greet her without even pausing to sniff. When he was in the house, he never wanted to be anywhere else but with her. He was a comfort to her, and good company, even if he was a bit of a barker.

Well, I'd say Sparky was unique, but I've heard too many of your stories about loving old dogs, and cuddly kittens and wise turtles and graceful birds to think that our Sparky was unusual. In fact, I think our creator has something to do with it. The two creation stories we hear in Genesis both include words about animals. In the first, God created animals and called them good. In the second creation story, God said it was not good for the first human to be alone, and made animals as the first companions, before making Eve. That our very earliest stories of the ordering of creation incorporate the arrival of animals tells us some important things: that the earliest people of faith recognized animals as a blessing of their God, that God knows we need nature and creatures along with each other and God, and that God calls the animals holy, and sacred, and good.

If you've ever been loved by an animal companion, you know what a blessing they are. You know what an angel looks like. And you know a little something about God's own love. Amen.



*Mom and Sparky - 1996?*