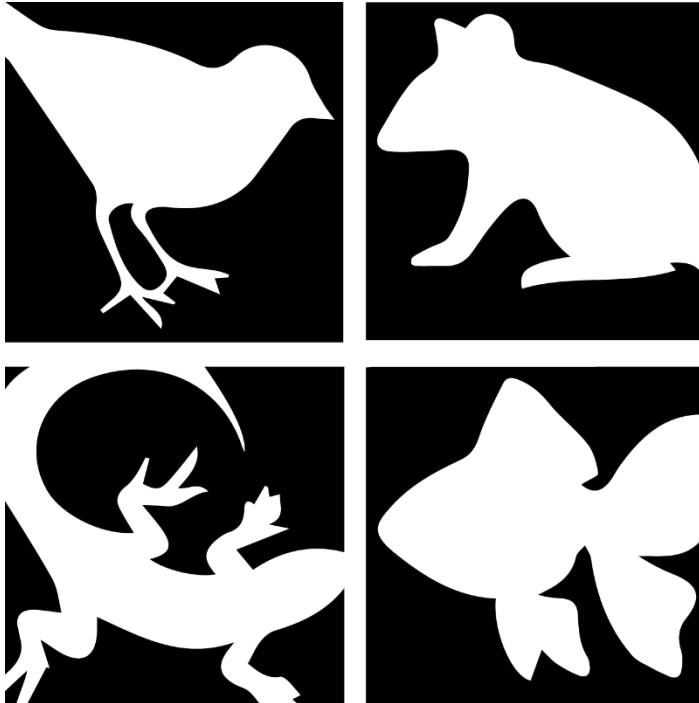


**“Do You Believe in Dog?”**

The Rev. Ryan Wiksell



October 6, 2024

The Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

Independence, MO

## THE BLESSING PRAYER

Creator God, we praise you for giving us the animals, birds and fish which fill your world. May we think of you and thank you when we care for our pets—when we love them and are loved by them.

We ask you, Lord, to help us be good to our pets always. Help us always to take care of them so that they will be healthy. May we all come into your even greater world of the kingdom of heaven where we shall see even more wonderful things and where we shall live and love for ever. This we ask to your eternal praise, and to our blessing. Amen.

## THE BLESSING OF EACH PET

*The blessing is usually done with the sprinkling of water over the animal and the owner.*

"N., may you be blessed in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. May you and (the name of the "owner") enjoy life together and find joy with the God who created you."

*or this*

"N., may you be blessed in the Name of God who created you, and may you and (owner's name) enjoy life together with our God."

*or this*

May you be blessed in the Name God, the Creator, Redeemer and of the Sustainer. May you and your animals enjoy life together and find joy with the God who created you. Amen.

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God. Amen.

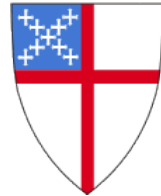
- How do you know you're a dyslexic agnostic insomniac?
  - You lay awake at night wondering if there's a Dog.
- I've heard that God gave us both dogs and cats as pets for a reason
  - We have dogs for when we're feeling down, and need a reminder that God loves us
  - And we have cats for when we're feeling a little cocky, and need a reminder that we're not that special.
- We have a cat, and she's not like that.
  - We adopted Charlotte at Christmas in 2021.
  - And we give her credit for having found the perfect house for our family... on Charlotte Street
  - She is not aloof, like the stereotypes suggest. She's very sweet and loving.
  - I suspect that she's not sure what to do with herself in this new house... it's not huge but it's so much bigger than our old apartment.
  - Sometimes she'll follow me from one floor to the next, so she can nap close to whatever I'm doing. A lot like a dog, actually.
- But regardless of whether our pets are clingy or aloof, quiet or loud, compliant or rebellious, we love them, right?
  - And part of the reason we love them is that they are just always themselves
  - They have no shame, no self-doubt
  - We are always talking about the "human condition"

- There is no such thing as the “canine condition” or the “feline condition”
- They know exactly how to be the creatures they were made to be.
- And I think God knew...
  - (That’s a funny way to start a sentence: “I think God knew”)
  - But I think it was part of God’s design to put us in relationship with the animals
  - Because God knew that we were going to struggle with what it means to be human
  - Because God gave us the ability to love *freely*...
  - Which can only be done when we are gifted with Free Will
  - And Free Will by definition gives us opportunities to lose track of who we really are. And *whose* we really are.
  - So God had Adam name the animals, as we read in Genesis this morning.
  - The act of naming is an act of conferring honor, but it’s also an act of establishing relationship. We see this when parents name children, and when God names and re-names people.
  - Our animals are there to remind us that we have an essential, God-given nature that is beautiful and holy and worthy, even when we struggle to see it.
  - That’s when we can see it reflected in our dogs and cats and maybe even our hamsters and birds and fish.
- We see ourselves reflected in our animals
  - Which is why we humanize them all the time. Maybe a little too much (Yes, I’m speaking to everyone who puts clothes on their dogs. You do you.)
  - But on the other side, we also see ourselves reflected in God.

- And maybe that's a big part of what it means to be human.
- That we are “a little higher than the animals” and “a little lower than the angels” as Hebrews says.
- We know what it is to be Earthy, biological organisms connected to nature and subject to the seasons and forces of creation.
- But we also know what it is to be spiritual, transcendent, visionary, eternal. And maybe this is closest definition we have to the “human condition”
  - stretching that span between Earthly and Heavenly.
  - Being true to myself while grappling with the range and potential of who I can be
- It's in our early years that this is the most intense. As babies, and as toddlers, we had a lot in common with the animals
  - We were just ourselves, period.
  - That's why nobody ever blames a baby for anything. Sure, you can get angry with a baby. You can resent a baby. But you can't really blame them, just like you can't really blame a pet. They are just doing what comes naturally.
  - But then we get a little older, and we start to understand our divine potential. We get a glimpse of the transcendent possibilities of our lives.
  - But it can feel a little like a tree reaching for the stars. You can stretch, and reach, but you're rooted to the ground.
- And just like God called Adam to connect with the animals in Genesis, I see Jesus calling us to connect with children in Mark.
  - Yes, there's more stuff in Mark that it may seem like I'm avoiding.

- So if you want to talk about Jesus' comments on divorce, I'll be sure to make space for that during Coffee Hour
- But for this moment here, it's important to look at how God urges us to stay connected to what keeps us grounded
  - Kneel down to play with a baby or a small child, and remember your essential simplicity. Remember that you are a Child of God, loved with perfect love.
  - Look in the eyes of your dog, or cat, or bird, which you may have named yourself, and see your image reflected in them.
  - And take joy in the fullness of what it means to be human... Both lofty and lowly, both simple and sophisticated
  - Even when it's a struggle... and it often is
  - We know that the God who made us this way is never finished until all our natures are fulfilled in our Creator
  - Amen.

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the  
**Sunday closest to October 5**



Proper 22  
Year B  
RCL

*Track 1*      or      *Track 2*

Job 1:1; 2:1-10	Genesis 2:18-24
Psalm 26	Psalm 8
Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12	Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12
Mark 10:2-16	Mark 10:2-16

## The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## Old Testament

### Genesis 2:18-24

The LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the LORD God caused a deep

sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
this one shall be called Woman,  
for out of Man this one was taken.”

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

## **The Psalm**

### **Psalm 8**

#### *Domine, Dominus noster*

- 1 O LORD our Governor, \*  
how exalted is your Name in all the world!
- 2 Out of the mouths of infants and children \*  
your majesty is praised above the heavens.
- 3 You have set up a stronghold against your adversaries, \*  
to quell the enemy and the avenger.
- 4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, \*  
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,
- 5 What is man that you should be mindful of him? \*  
the son of man that you should seek him out?
- 6 You have made him but little lower than the angels; \*  
you adorn him with glory and honor;
- 7 You give him mastery over the works of your hands; \*  
you put all things under his feet:
- 8 All sheep and oxen, \*  
even the wild beasts of the field,



9 The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, \*  
and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea.

10 O LORD our Governor, \*  
how exalted is your Name in all the world!

## **The Epistle**

### **Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12**

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere,

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
or mortals, that you care for them?

You have made them for a little while lower than the angels;  
you have crowned them with glory and honor,  
subjecting all things under their feet.”

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are

sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying,

“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters,  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”

## **The Gospel**

### **Mark 10:2-16**

Some Pharisees came, and to test Jesus they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

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*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

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