



## *Round Hill Community Church*

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**Sermon: September 28, 2009**

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**God's Message to us through the Animals,** Shannon A. White  
Job 12:7-10

12th Century mystic, Meister Eckhart once said "If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature—even a caterpillar—I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature." Just looking around the room, I know there are volumes of sermons that could be written based on the relationships represented here.

Our pets teach us so much about life, don't they? And they help us keep it real too...Der-  
eke Bruce: "In order to keep a true perspective of one's importance, everyone should have a dog that will worship him and a cat that will ignore him."

But our beloved pets, as well as those who live out in the wild, I believe, show us important aspects of God's nature...and that's why we have come here this morning...to acknowledge that connection

I love the scripture lesson from Job this morning...Job is telling his friend Bildad not only that animals know that nothing happens without God...but that if we are open to it, animals can actually be communicators of God's grace in our lives.

That's not too much of a stretch to believe...Martin Buber 20th Century philosopher said what we all know so well: "An animal's eyes have the power to speak a great language." That is the language which communicates unconditional love, acceptance, loyalty and grace and security.

Dogs have been given the title of humankind's best friend for a reason...they have been companions to countless people through the ages. But they have also been trained to help guide those who are blind around busy streets and assist disabled and infirmed people in their homes. Dogs are regular visitors in nursing homes where they provide comfort on many levels to patients. Young and old alike...may find their hearts opening in the most unexpected ways as they relate to their dogs.

Animals of other species have been agents of God's healing and grace in our world. Horses, for example, have been instrumental in therapeutic settings to help heal deep wounds in troubled teens and help autistic children find a center within themselves.

Cheryl Morikawa writes in her poem Three Little Fish:

Who would have thought, three fish in a bowl, could teach so many of life's lessons, to a four year old.

Lessons of love, caring for another, lessons of responsibility, of being the 'mother.'

Lessons of loss, that life does end, lessons of heartache, of missing a friend.

Lessons of faith, of unending love, lessons of trust, in Heaven above.

Three little fish, how did God know, would teach so much, to a four year old.

In her book, What Animals Can Teach Us about Spirituality, Animal behaviorist and therapist Diana Guerrero tells why animals touch our souls so deeply.

“Animals remain bound to the Spirit and so not follow any religion or spiritual practices. Because of that direct connection many of us lack, animals can link us to the Divine in new ways. In essence, animals can help us in our personal and spiritual growth, and compel us to pursue a connection to Spirit without the need for a religious or denominational approach. Some people search their entire lives for such a connection. Learning how to relate to animals can be a first step to recognizing how to unite with your spirit.”

That's true, isn't it? She goes on to say how different animals “embody ideal traits” and serve as “good examples of right action” which, in turn, help lead us in the way of Spirit. According to Guerrero, Dogs and cats embody loyalty and show us that the quality of bringing out the best in another... even our adversaries...is a trait worthy of emulating.

As I was writing part of this sermon just before 8 a few mornings ago one morning, I became somewhat annoyed with our dog, Max. He was whining, sitting at the bottom of our stairs with his head and ears alert...waiting for the first stirring of my daughter Peyton to get out of bed so he could welcome her to a new day and play with her. Smile...alas, the loyalty is stunning...if only I could be that welcoming of everyone in my life, everyday, all of the time.

Dogs also show us that leading a life of integrity is important...think about it when they do something wrong, they don't deny it, and run away they come and hang their heads in admission...

Guerrero tells of the traits of hard work, relaxation and play as exemplified by dogs, cats, and marine mammals such as otters.

Physical power and emotional strength pointing toward intuition, empowerment, self-acceptance and confidence are exemplified by bears, cats, insects and coyotes.

Far-sightedness, inner vision, detachment, discernment, mindfulness and letting go are qualities Guerrero says shown in eagles, pelicans, bats, and bears.

The “mind of the dolphin” and other wild animals teach us about harmony, synchronicity, and the importance of breathing.

And finally the wisdom of the owl leads us to develop our skills to listen to the animals and ultimately to the Divine.

We've celebrated this blessing for the last few years. Each time I have experienced a sense of holy awe as we are surrounded with life expressed with such creativity in different beings...all in one room. It leads me to affirm what Susan Chernak McElroy has said: "In their innocence and wisdom, in their connection to the earth and its most ancient rhythms, animals show us a way back to a home they have never left."

Amen.