

**The Blessing of Paying Attention**  
**St. Francis & Blessing of the Animals Sunday, October 1, 2023, 10:00 a.m.**  
**All Saints Church, Pasadena**  
**The Rev. Mark Chase**

Well Good Morning Beloved, I have to start off by admitting that on a day like today, I could not resist the urge, to begin this sermon, with the words of the late prophet DMX, who so famously pondered the question...."Where my dogs at?????" Or to ask a similar question posed by the prophets known as the Baha Men, "who let the dogs out??!!!" And in this case, the dogs, cats, snakes, birds, turtles, fish, bearded dragons, geckos, Mike Kinman's personal favorite, Ferrets....and so much more...beloved this is a day where we celebrate and feast on the wisdom and life of St. Francis of Assisi, a spiritual teacher and mystic who had a love for all of creation and most notably, animals, who was rumored to have one day negotiated with a wolf, to stop attacking local towns people, if the towns people agreed to feed it. It is in honor of his love for animals that we love on our animals today...

Beloved, contrary to popular belief, we are not gathered here today for the purpose of having these animals blessed, but we're here to recognize that every creature in this room has already profoundly, blessed us...the animals in this space have seen us at our best and our worst, have been held by us and have somehow held us, during job transitions, life transitions, diagnoses that we didn't see coming, breakups, birthdays, new born babies, graduations and weddings, and so much more...the animals in this space have already got the drop on us when it comes to blessings, so this might be the strangest thing we've ever done in church, but can we just give the animals in this room, a round of applause, for how they have already blessed our lives....

That's what we are doing in this space beloved. Recognizing, Paying attention to what has already blessed us...Now full disclosure, I've never owned a pet, it looks amazing! But I have given out plenty of blessings...

Here's a secret...As priests when we give a blessing, all we're doing, is paying attention, to that which God has already called good! That's all a blessing is...paying attention... That's the secret, The cat, is literally and metaphorically, out of the bag...LOL. Okay i promise that's my last animal pun, in this paragraph.... That's all a blessing is.....is paying attention...In fact as Barbara Brown Taylor Reminds us in her book "Altar in the Wild", she says "A blessing, does not confer holiness. The holiness is already there, embedded in the very givenness of the thing, because God made these things, they share in God's own holiness, whether or not they meet our minimum requirements for a blessing." Ask your neighbor, Human neighbor, neighbor, "Are you paying attention this morning"

We are here this morning, to recognize, and pay attention to that which God has already whispered over...."Holy, Holy, Holy..." Now I know, theologically, that might be ruffling some, feathers....okay that was quick but Hey, in fairness, it's a new paragraph...but looking for the

holy, paying attention to every good thing, simultaneously means we are paying attention, to every God thing, and that turns life into one divine scavenger hunt....

... where we are hunting, for what God has already declared holy, where we are hunting, for where the hand of God is already gently and powerfully at work, where we are hunting, for where the hope of God is already breaking through the clouds of despair, where we are hunting, for where the heart of God has already poured itself out...where we are hunting, for every possible glimpse of heaven and healing, where we are hunting for the divine, the same way preachers hunt, for alliteration...Any divine scavenger hunters in the house this morning....

“Beloved we don’t possess blessing that we pass on to someone or something else, we pronounce blessing that is already in progress.” This is about our Animals, and this is not about our animals...Where are the areas of our lives where we need to pay attention, and pronounce a blessing??? Look at your neighbor and say neighbor...“What else about you could use a blessing???”

For some of us its our very bodies...the whole thing or for some of us that particularly stubborn part of our bodies that we’d wish would cooperate, for some of us, maybe we just got the diagnosis, and need to stubbornly cling to the hope, that God can still be faithful, in our life, as we navigate what is facing us, in our flesh! For some of it’s the unknown, we’re walking into a season of mystery, a season, that we need to pronounce blessing over, because though it is a season of mystery, the predictable and the familiar, was a season or misery....ahhhhh that was good Imma say that one more time...some of us need to pronounce blessing over the mystery, because though we are in a season of mystery, the predictable and familiar, was a season misery...for some of us it’s our children who need to pronounce blessing over, wooooo don’t raise your hand just blink thank you I see those blinks...driving us up the wall, but if we look, we can see the hand of God, because though they are driving us up the wall, at least now they’ve started using turn signals lol, that might be literal for parents of teenagers, for some of us it’s our partner, if you’re sitting next to them, resist the urge to elbow them as I say this...I don’t know what it is for you, but just close your eyes if you can, without your animal escaping, hold your hand over your heart, imagine that place in your life that needs a blessing and say these words. “There is good here. God is still here....”

And all this blessedness, all this goodness, is worthy of the dignity of rest...whooooo I had to work hard for that one. I connected that dot at about 10:57 P.M. St. Francis would be proud...All this blessedness, all this goodness, is worthy of the dignity of rest...the only prerequisite for rest, is to need it, and to exist, that’s the Good News in this passage

And the Good News that i think this day represents, is that when you come to Jesus to find rest, I’m so glad, that Jesus doesn’t ask you to fill out an application, there are no hidden fees, that there are no deductibles in the economy of God, no part of yourself that you have to leave at the door, no prerequisite other than your need, no theological or doctrinal exam to pass, no Fico score requirement (praise The Lord), I know most of ya’ll got good credit up in here but for

some of us don't raise your hand just blink, no Fico score requirement is a blessing thank you Jesus, No pre-requisite for rest, other than our need...the only thing you need to qualify for the rest that Jesus offers is to need the rest that Jesus offers..."Do you need him this morning?"

This passage is also a challenge, to create a world in which everyone has access to the dignity of rest...BECAUSE BELOVED, some people, can't get to Jesus, to find rest, because racialized capitalism, is preventing them from reaching him...As hotel workers, all over LA, and right here in Pasadena stood on strike, I stood, and some of you as well stood, on the picket lines, with them in solidarity, Reverend Mike, you were arrested, in solidarity, with workers from Unite Local 11, who were having to sleep instead of eat, on their lunch break, because they live so far from where they worked, that it was the only time they could shut their eyes. So they had to choose between food and sleep.

There are also those whose labor, is being exploited this very second, in the prisons and jails all across America, including Men's Central, right here in L.A. a jail whose conditions are so horrid, that if we took every animal in this place, and put them in men's central jail tomorrow, it would be shut down due to the outrage...and I know, we generally accept that because some of the people there have done some terrible things, and that may be so but that does not change the reality that the prison system in America, is in and of itself, a terrible thing...What do the words of Jesus mean, to that person, unless we collectively, co-labor for a world, in which that person, can get to Jesus...its like the friends who cut a whole through the roof, and lowered their friend to Jesus, we collectively, have to join in the efforts that already underway, that are cutting holes through the glass ceiling of racialized capitalism, and exploitative labor, so that every human being, can experience the dignity of rest...there are people, who are worn down and tired, because systems are making them worn down and tired, much like the class of people Jesus ministered to, and came from himself...

Alright now, i'm getting ready to close, it's too many animals up in here for me to preach long, usually when i preach long ya'll have to be civilized about it, now you got an excuse, you can just pretend that your dog can't take it anymore...

So we need an external rest, from the systems that are exploiting us.

And we also need an INTERNAL rest. Because sometimes these systems get in us...and sometimes, we just have really un-healthy patterns of belief about ourselves...and there are those of us in this room, myself included, who have systemic advantages that allow us the actual time and space to rest...and instead of resting, we toil...Could it be Beloved, that the recognition that we are enough, that we are received in God's sight, and that we already share in God's holiness, and that we are just plain good...that we are just plain good...no disclaimers qualifiers or fine print..... is the foundation for any rest to take root in us internally...see, many in society don't rest and take sick days because systems keep those things from us, and some of us don't rest, or take sick days because the thought, of not measuring up, not being enough, falling "behind", has already made us sick in our souls.

Look at your neighbor and say neighbor, "You better take them sick days if you have them..." As Tricia Hersey reminds us in her work "rest is resistance; a manifesto" She says this "I refuse to push my body to the brink of exhaustion and destruction. Let the chips fall where they may. I trust myself more than capitalism. Our refusal will make space for abundance. We will have to leap and trust rest. May the ground underneath hold us, and if we must collapse, may a soft pillow be there, swaddling us all back to our deepest selves. A more human place. A resting place."

Trust your goodness more than you trust the values that we are socially conditioned to trust. Trust your goodness more than the American dream, or than the protestant work ethic, that always struck me, the protestant work ethic, named after white people who were exploiting labor from enslaved Africans. How did you get "work ethic" attributed to your character? You see why we can't trust these things? You see the cool thing about the animals in your arms, they don't care about how productive you are, and I know you're like but Chase they also don't know how productive I am, but they also don't care...

Renita Weems notes in her book listening for God that as she went deeper into the world of gardening she began to notice something, she began to notice that every tree has and needs a season, where it produces NOTHING, and without that season, where a tree, produces NOTHING, there can be no season where it produces ANYTHING! We all, by virtue of being human, are worthy of the dignity of days, weeks, and seasons where we aren't required to produce anything. Where we are dormant, where we rest, and our only job is to recognize, and pay attention to that which is already good...and May the animals in this space, who could not care less about our productivity be a sign that it is okay to do so. Right now i wish i had a pet, that didn't care, that my sermon may have been too long...

Amen.