

Hope Central Church  
Rev. Laura Ruth Jarrett  
Who is We?  
Pentecost 18, 10/12/14  
Celebrating the Feast of St. Francis and the Blessing of the Animals.  
Psalm 104

Matthew 11:25-30

At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father-Mother, God of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, O God, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father-Mother; and no one knows the Child except the Father-Mother, and no one knows the Father-Mother except the Child and anyone to whom the Child chooses to reveal God. "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Make me an instrument of your peace . . .

During one of the most profound nights of loss when I was a young adult, I lay alone on my back on the floor of my bedroom crying raging tears, and my cat St. Francis, Frank for short, lay with me, in the crook of my arm, purring prayers in my ear, never leaving.

Our animals are dear to us, keep us company, keep us from the edge, keep us engaged and laughing. Suzanne Bossert and her dog Maestro comfort folks professionally. My sister in law has a dog who visits the nursing home where she works everyday, drawing out communication and compassion from folks who have a hard time remembering, from folks who have no other relatives anymore.

A friend and I have an imaginary dog: Halfway Riley. He lives half way between our houses, maybe in this church. He's imaginary because - and we blame this on our partners who can't imagine having a dog in our houses. Truthfully we have an imaginary dog because we would be incapable of caring for a dog, so distracted are we. For example, I made carvings of Half-Way Riley, one for me and one for my friend. She took her Half-way Riley to Concord, to give him a little run, as it were, and left him there - and had to go back and get him. Perhaps if Half-way Riley were real instead of imaginary, he might have barked and reminded my friend to bring him home with to Jamaica Plain.

Dr. Lisa Moses, one of the veterinarians at Angel Memorial, a friend said that it is true of some dog owners, they're unable to see their pets' needs, to see what they need, to see them as they are instead of imagining the pets they love are not separate from themselves. They feed their pets human food, refuse to walk

them, or walk them too much, They refuse to acknowledge pain or illness in their pets or project their own symptoms on their pets. The less healthy the human, the more complete the disconnection from beholding the animal's personality, need, joy.

I grew up around farming people, and of those people, who to a one generally thought animals were made for the humans, you could tell a farmer's health by the health of the animals.

The writer of today's Psalm, some 2500 years ago, and St. Francis in his writing and witness from the 13th century invite us across the ages to praise God for all creation and creatures, and to identify with them, as a way of being open to God, as a way of making meaning, as a practice for the preparation and action for the repair of the world.

What I mean to say is that we are taught, at least I was taught that we are the center of reality. Our reality is central, and so it is and should be when we are infants. As we mature, as other realities cross our paths, we act as host and visiting reality as guest. This is good of us, of course, to be hospitable. But there is a spiritual reality that is larger than our own, and we want it, long for it, many of us because we've found our realities to be too small, or not quite true, or not compassionate enough to live inside. But it turns out that acting as host to other realities exclusively for our own purposes makes us like humans who don't necessarily see the needs of their pets. We project on our guests only what we know. We project on our guests the characteristics we cannot tolerate in ourselves, or project our goodness on them because we've been taught or received teaching that who and what we are isn't good enough.

This is how racism works, I think, homophobia, misogyny, the blunting of men. This is how the hate of beauty works. We project what we don't love or know on others, or we receive that projection, and then we systematize it, make national constitutions, economic policy, even policing policy and enact them.

Did you read that preliminary report of the ACLU, reported on WBUR's *Cognoscenti*, that gives facts to back up the stories we've been hearing from our beloveds, that the Boston Police, even though they have changed for the better in recent years, still stop and frisk young men of color for nothing. Even though crime has gone down in Boston, the stopping and frisking has not. It turns out that crime, and stopping and frisking young men of color has no correlation.

What if instead of understanding ourselves to be hosts of reality, what if we all became, especially at Hope Central, guests of each other's realities. What if this were the practice and key to seeing God? It's especially important now for us, now that some of us have begun to imagine another part-time associate pastor, a person of color for Worship, for Adult Formation, for Pastoral Care.

I know that there are financial matters to consider and also the energy of the congregation. But I know we are willing to grow as a congregation. I want to ask us to begin to imagine our congregation not as a place willing to host people of color in our congregation, but also to be guests of people of color. I'm asking us who are white and maybe also some people of color, what would it be like to de-center ourselves as a white congregation wanting to be diverse, but a diverse congregation where many realities co-exist, where the ultimate reality is God's and the practice of it is to praise Brother Sun, Sister Moon, and all created beings. What if we, were to grow healthy enough to share the work of being guests of reality?

We are a strong people. I see you with your pets, your animals, your children, your friends, your parks and your celestial longings for God. I see us leaving the idolatry of our single reality so that all the creatures of the universe may be seen, cared for, and free from all oppression so that we may concentrate on our work toward the heart of God. Amen.