

Psalm 104:24, 27-31:

*O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.*

*These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.*

*When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.*

*When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works.*

Matthew 6:25-33:

*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

If only we, as humans, could be more like other living creatures, the gospel passage seems to say. God's other living creations (the birds of the air and the lilies of the field) are free from worry. They know they will be provided for, and this allows them, I believe, to be much more of service to God's kingdom.

I love the story of the little boy who realized this at a young age. A friend sent this to me, and I do not know to whom to give the credit. You may have heard it:

A veterinarian was called to examine a ten-year-old Irish Wolfhound named Belker. The dog's owners, Ron, his wife Lisa, and their little boy Shane, were all very attached to Belker, and they were hoping for a miracle.

The vet examined Belker and found he was dying of cancer. He told the family he couldn't do anything more for Belker, and offered to perform the euthanasia procedure for the dog in their home.

As they made arrangements, Ron and Lisa told the vet they thought it would be good for six-year-old Shane to observe the procedure. They felt as though Shane might learn something from the experience.

The next day, the vet felt the familiar catch in his throat as Belker 's family surrounded him. Shane seemed so calm, petting the dog for the last time, that he wondered if the boy understood what was going on. Within a few minutes, Belker slipped peacefully away.

The little boy seemed to accept Belker's transition without any difficulty or confusion. They sat together for a while after Belker's death, wondering aloud about the sad fact that animal lives are shorter than human lives. Shane, who had been listening quietly, piped up, "I know why."

Startled, they all turned to him. What came out of his mouth next stunned them. The vet had never heard a more comforting explanation, and he said it changed the way he tries to live.

The boy said, "People are born so that they can learn how to live a good life — like loving everybody all the time and being nice, right? Well, dogs already know how to do that, so they don't have to stay as long."

We can a great deal from dogs and their behavior:

When loved ones come home, always run to greet them.

Never pass up the opportunity to go for a joyride.

Allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face.

Take naps.

Stretch before rising.

Run, romp, and play daily.

Thrive on attention and let people touch you.

Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.

On warm days, stop to lie on your back in the grass.

On hot days, drink lots of water and lay under a shady tree.

When you're happy, dance around and wag your entire body.

Delight in the simple joy of a long walk.

Be loyal.

Never pretend to be something you're not.

If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it.

When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by, and nuzzle them gently.

I spent last week in the East Coast visiting friends and family. My best friend from High School, Lianne, told me as we walked through the forests of fall foliage about her cat, Trixie, who was inadvertently left outdoors one evening and fell prey to a coyote. Her young son, like Shane in the last story, comforted his distraught mother by saying, "Mom, it's okay, it's part of the natural life cycle." Trixie was the sister of their other cat, Snickers, and they had lived their entire lives together from birth. People sometimes wonder if animals are capable of depth of emotion. After Trixie's death, Snickers did not eat for six days, and did not go near the room where he and his sister had slept and played together. He was grieving. Amazingly, Snickers and the family dog, Grady, whom Snickers had always avoided, began befriending each other. I saw them rub noses and play together. I saw a photo of how they now sleep: entwined.

The good news from the gospel passage today is that God provides what we need, and often it is right in front of us. We need not worry about anything, and are called to simply trust in God's provisioning.

The Compassionate Kids defined a blessing as "something nice & kind you give someone" and "God protecting you and loving you more, very powerfully."

Animals are such a blessing to our lives. Let us give thanksgiving for them now, by bringing them forward for an individual blessing.