

## **ANIMAL CELEBRATION**

The idea behind this celebration comes from St. Francis' Blessing of the Animals. The difference in our service is that we do not presume to bless the animals. Instead, we start out by recognizing that it is animals who bless our lives. As I was sitting and writing this my little 55 pound lapdog Dizzi was resting on my leg encouraging me while Molly Brown the Maltese was lying on the floor near me. Those of us who share our homes with dogs and cats and other critters know how much of a difference those animals make in our lives. I didn't bring Dizzi today because she has a tendency to bark a lot when she gets excited and also jumps on people to get their attention before rolling on her back to get her belly rubbed. Molly Brown went to an Animal Celebration service several years and started a fight between 2 big dogs, while of course getting out of the way herself. She also can make quite a bit of noise for all of her 12-13 pounds of energy. Molly doesn't like to walk as far as she used to and sleeps a bit more now that she is 12, but she still fits her early nickname as a treat seeking missile! Now, I haven't served on the staff of any cats in a few years, but in times past I have also shared my home with cats and tropical fish as well as up to four dogs!

Our household animal companions certainly make a difference in our lives, keeping us company, listening to us, keeping us active. Animals of the wild make a difference in other ways. Too often, as we get hung up on our human interactions, we forget that we share the Earth with billions of other creatures. Humans and our primate ancestors have only been around a few million years while other creatures have been on the earth for far longer. We may be the smartest of earth's animals, so far, but who knows whether we will last as long as the dinosaurs? Seeing ourselves as separate from the animal kingdom, as people have done in the last few hundred years risks imagining that humanity can survive without the rest of the animals.

Today we know much more about the roles that animals have in ecosystems. We have seen the way that ecosystems have changed when wolves and bear and bison were removed from the ecosystems that had developed in North America. Today many of the large animals in Africa and Asia are endangered, including Lions, Tigers, Elephants, Rhinoceros, and Pandas. The loss of these species will not only be a loss of beautiful creatures, but will dramatically change ecosystems.

Even if increasing numbers of people adopt a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle, the changes to the planet from the increasing growth of human populations and the pollution and other environmental damage which has resulted paired with the losses of animal species may forever change the whole earth ecosystem. The lives of the animals are tied to the lives of people and we have a responsibility to keep the animals healthy.

Today we take time to remember the ways that animals have touched our lives, but we need to remember them every day rather than just once a year. There are organizations we can support like the World Wildlife Fund, ASPCA, the Humane Society and various conservation groups that work to protect animals and wildlife habitats. Zoos have been working for decades to insure that endangered species are protected through captive breeding programs and many Zoos support wildlife parks and conservation areas around the world. When natural disasters like floods and tornadoes and earthquakes hit, both domesticated and wild animals suffer. With all the recent and current fires, many animals have been lost or have lost their homes. One of the big needs after the fires is food and pet care items, bowls and cages, etc.

As we celebrate the lives of animals and show our appreciation for them this day, may we commit ourselves to thinking more often about the lives of animals, making sure that animals are healthy and have a healthy habitat whether they are in our homes or out in the world. Thank you and bless you animals for participating in our service today! We wish you long and happy lives! Woof, Meow, Chirp, hiss, and Caw! Amen!