



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Easter Day, April 24, 2011

The Rev. Sharon Gracen

I started noticing it about a year ago, before I left California. One of my friends posted a video on Facebook which amazed me. It seems that somewhere in Chile, a dog was hit on a busy highway. He couldn't get himself to safety and was surely not going to survive. Another dog braved the same fate and made his way out to the injured one and with cars whizzing by, tried to pull the wounded other with his teeth. When that didn't work, he didn't give up. He carefully put his front legs around the other dog and pulled him, inches at a time until some humans finally came and lent a hand. It was tug at the heart strings all the way and then I got thinking about what was really amazing about it. Not that a dog wouldn't try to rescue a friend – there are lots of stories of canine heroes – but the complex thinking and problem solving involved. Max the Church dog has not evolved that far – his idea of problem solving is to bark at us until we get the bowl and take it into the kitchen. Clearly this dog from the Southern hemisphere was different. He has gone beyond basic canine loyalty and into new territory.

Then there was the ever-so-cute YouTube video of the little black and white cat and the crow. The crow had adopted the abandoned kitten, fed it, and taught it to stay out of the street. They are best friends and we are enchanted watching them cavort and play together, sometimes rolling around on the ground wrestling. Now the kitten may have been too young to know better, but a wild crow is no dummy. Survival instincts were overcome by something. Whatever could it be?

And then there was the story of the snake, from Liaoning Province, China. A man named Yu Feng, found the sick black snake outside his house and took it home and nursed it back to health using herbal remedies. After the snake had recovered, Yu Feng took it away from his house and released it back into the wild. But the snake returned, not once but three times. Yu Feng accepted the situation and let the snake stay. He even named him Long Long--probably the serpentine equivalent of *Spot*. One night Yu Feng was awakened by something cold on his face – it was Long Long. Now, while I would have run screaming from the house, Yu Feng placidly turned over and went back to sleep. But Long Long was undeterred. He grabbed a hold of Yu Feng's pajama sleeve with his teeth, and whipped himself around, slapping the bed with his tail. Then he went over to the mother-in-law and did the same. Finally, Yu Feng got up to investigate and found his mother-in-law's electric blanket on fire. Long Long is a hero and now rarely leaves Yu Feng's side. Anyone who knows anything about snakes knows that they are missing the part of the brain that allows us, and other mammals, to have emotions, feel affection, and form attachments. What could be going on here?

The evidence keeps piling up, the recent cat and dolphin friendship. They spend long periods of time together, playing which consists of the cat reaching out and whapping the dolphin on the nose and the dolphin sliding down under the water, only to surge up and splash the cat. Then they engage in public displays of affection, snout to whisker. It's an unusual friendship.

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And most recently, the story of a Canada goose who had lost her mate. Without his protective presence she would be at-risk as she sat on her nest, which she had built in a large urn in a cemetery. Cemeteries aren't wild about geese because they really do make a mess and are generally, dare I say it, fowl-tempered. This particular cemetery had someone with a couple of dogs who would go around and scare the geese away. Well, on one swing through the gravestones, the goose-shoo-er and his dogs were confronted by a deer that would not let them approach the urn and the nesting mother goose. The doe, a deer, a female deer, has taken up protective vigil, making it safe for Mother Goose to become a single parent. Oh, there's so much going on in this story! But for our purposes today, it is that in the normal animal kingdom, deer and geese have no interaction, they don't even know that the other exists. So what is going on here?

Well, it's Easter, plain and simple. As much as we would like to believe that what happened in the tomb was all about what Jesus did for us, it is bigger than that. Easter is a cosmic event in which all of creation is put right, returned to God's original intent for it. Romans 8:19 tells us that "All creation waits with eager longing..." Well, some of it isn't waiting any longer. All of the animals in these stories are examples of what Easter looks like. It looks like love; it looks like going beyond all that you have known to enter new territory. Easter looks like doing something new, something that never seemed possible before. If you are a crow, why would you think that playing with a cat would be a good idea? It's never gone well for the dearly departed in your family tree. But on this glorious morning, historic prey and predator roles are overcome. The essential friendship within creation is uncovered by Easter. Perhaps even traditional human enemies can find hope in this. A new day could dawn for the Hatfields and McCoys, Israel and Palestine, even Republicans and Democrats! Alleluia for the cat and the crow.

Easter looks like the destruction of barriers, symbolized by the destruction of death. Death is the barrier that seems to define our human experience as fundamentally different from our spiritual natures. Well, God wants us to know that there is no difference between heaven and earth. Eternal life is ours, here in the physical here and now and in the spiritual hereafter. The barrier is breached. Death is no more to be feared than graduation. The deer in the cemetery breached the barriers of oblivion and blindness to see the goose as a friend in need. Her gentle courage gives us proof that all that keeps us from knowing one another is an illusion. We may have built it but today, God takes it down. Alleluia for the goose and the deer.

Easter looks like freedom. It is liberation from limitation. This morning, anything is possible. There is no problem that cannot be solved if love is the starting place. We can walk out into the traffic of a death trap highway and save a suffering friend or a whole planet. To quote the prophet Yoda, "size matters not!" Just because we've never been able to find solutions to problems before is no reason to believe that we can't do it now. Christ is risen from the dead! Anything is possible. Alleluia for the ingenuity of the dog!

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Easter looks like a new way of thinking – it is thinking with the mind of Christ instead of our instinctive and learned behavior. If a snake, with its limited brain power can transcend biology, then, we who have been made in the image of God can put our brains to work imagining what has never been considered. With love as our motivation, we can truly live as if heaven's on earth. Alleluia for impossible love from a snake, undoing animosity as old as Eden.

One more story and this one says it all. No one knows what was going on in the mind of the Kenyan lioness but when she came upon the wandering baby antelope, rather than eating it, she adopted it. Over six years, this lioness has adopted three baby antelopes. The last one happened on a Good Friday. The power of Easter is at work in the Serengeti, and has given us proof that the peaceable kingdom is not just some lovely dream of a long dead prophet but it is here. Because of Easter, the restoration of all of creation is complete. Christ is risen and the lion lies down with the kid. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

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