

TALK FOR BSJ PET SERVICE: 1ST SEPTEMBER 2024 (based on Psalm 104 and Revelation 5:13-14)

Our pets - a wonderful gift from God

Ask any pet owner what their pet means to them, and they'll usually come up with words like love, companionship, loyalty, friendship. For many, they're a valued member of the family, and for some, our only companion. Their unconditional acceptance of us, even when we forget to give them their breakfast or cut short their walk, is a source of great comfort.

But how often do we step back and take a moment to fully appreciate them, or indeed any of God's gifts? That's just what the verses from the Psalm do - they remind us of everything that is wonderful about God's creation. After all, so much of it existed long before we did. And when God created humankind, we took on the role of guardians of his wonderful world. The Psalm is a heartfelt recognition of God's hand in making the habitats, the weather, and all that is necessary for us and nature to thrive including, I am happy to note, "wine to gladden the human heart"!

However, that Psalm was written centuries before we started in any major way to put our own stamp on the planet, and take the natural world for granted, exploiting parts of it to extinction. The Psalm says about God: "when you open your hand, [creatures both great and small] are filled with good things". But we have been denying nature some of those good things by taking them away for ourselves. Our first hymn reminded us that all we have needed, God's hand has provided; and our second hymn that all things are sustained and sheltered by him. Yet nowadays, we seem to think that we no longer need his hand to provide, that we can do it ourselves. In many ways, the act of caring for animals reminds us of our duty towards them. And that animal can be absolutely

anything, from a goldfish or stick insect, to a cat, dog or horse. It's their reliance on us that can help us to understand our duty of care to the wider natural world.

Someone once said: "A dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than he loves himself"..... mind you, it's up for debate whether that's 100% true of our dog, Lottie. But the point is that even while they totally rely on us, they offer so much in return - not just companionship, but also a sense of purpose, and of course assistance to those who are blind, or deaf, or have a disability.

I believe that animals are a test of our character, of humankind's capacity for empathy, for decent, honourable conduct and for faithful stewardship. I shall end on these words from American author Marc Bekoff: "Let us remember that animals are not mere resources for human consumption. They are splendid beings in their own right, who have evolved alongside us as co-inheritors of all the beauty and abundance of life on this planet".

In the name of Christ, amen