**"Sharing Space"**

*A Reflection by the Rev. Dr. Stephanie May*
*For Animal Blessing Sunday*
*First Parish in Wayland*
*October 28, 2018*

Yesterday, I bought a bag of marbles. As a foot exercise from a running injury, I am supposed to grab marbles with my toes and carry them a few inches before dropping them again. My son was with me when I opened them and we had the same though: "Aphrodite." Aphrodite is our one-year old black cat . . . although we still call her 'the kitten'. Making sure to find a very large marble that she could not swallow, I rolled the marble along the hardwood floor. Aphrodite immediately bounded after it.

For me, interacting with a playful spirit like Aphrodite's is one of the great joys of sharing space with an animal. Even our oldest cat, twelve-year old Garbanzo, still bats at another cat to initiate play. They play and they play and they play. Sometimes I simply watch and other times their desire for play draws me into a game—rolling a marble, dangling a string, or flicking my finger at a paw through the stair rails where a cat waits to play the familiar game of "surprise" attack.

We share space, these cats and me. Sometimes, when I stare at these fuzzy creatures sprawled around the living room like they are a pride of lions lounging on the savannah, I wonder at the oddity of having animals *in* the house. So many other animals and insects we chase *out* of the house—like mice and spiders. I look at these pets and consider what it would be like to have a squirrel wandering the wood floors? Or, deer snoozing on the couch? Or, a black bear wandering down the stairs as cool and calmly as one meandered across our yard a few weeks ago?

While we may not welcome *all* animals into our houses, we do live always surrounded by birds, mammals, and reptiles as well as insects below our feet and buzzing around our heads. We live within a web of living creatures that are co-inhabitants of this shared world. We are interconnected with one another—sharing the same systems of water, air, soil, and sun. And, we rely on them for food. Sometimes we rely directly on them by eating meat or by eating animal products like eggs, milk, and ice cream. And, sometimes we rely indirectly on animals by eating fruit and vegetables pollinated by bees . . . perhaps even by our own First Parish bees!

We share this world with creatures of the land, water, and sky. We rely on them—even as some animals, like our pets, rely on us. This reliance, or interconnection, is so much a part



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of our lives that we may sometimes take it for granted. And so, it is important to have days like this one where we celebrate our animal connections. We recognize the ways in which we rely on one another—pets that need to be fed; people that need to be reminded to play.

And, perhaps, like me, you sometimes also rely on your animal—living or stuffed—to comfort you as well. One of the best parts of being connected to an animal is having them delight in us or to simply be there, keeping us company in tough times. And we know there *are* tough times for each of us and sometimes for whole groups of us. So, we need to take the time to notice and care for the life-giving relationships in our lives. We need to pay attention to what is good, to what makes us smile, to what helps sustain us with a dose of joy and comfort. Because no matter what else may be happening, it's always important to remember that loving and being loved matters.

THIS is no small thing. It is not a saccharin sweet trope. Choosing to love and not to hate, to care for another life and not to destroy it, is core to our humanity and our dignity. So many of us learn this by loving our pets, as well as the people and other animals in our lives.

May we hold fast to these relationships of love—a love that can cross species and differences of many kinds . . . and accepts us as we are.

So may it be. Amen.



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