

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I. A Man and His Dog Going to Heaven



A man and his dog were walking along a road

The man was enjoying the scenery, when suddenly it occurred to him that he was dead.

He remembered dying, and that the dog walking beside him had been dead for years.

He wondered where the road was leading them.

After a while, they came to a high, white stone wall along one side of the road.



It looked like fine marble ... at the top of a long hill, it was broken by a tall arch that glowed in the sunlight.

When he was standing before it he saw a magnificent gate in the arch that looked like mother-of-pearl, and the street that led to the gate looked like pure gold.

He and the dog walked toward the gate, and as he got closer, he saw a man at a desk to one side.

When he was close enough, he called out, "Excuse me, where are we?"

"This is Heaven, sir," the man answered.

"Wow! Would you happen to have some water?" the man asked.

"Of course, sir. Come right in, and I'll have some ice water brought right up."

The man gestured, and the gate began to open.

“What about my friend,” the traveler asked, gesturing towards his dog, “Can he come in, too?”

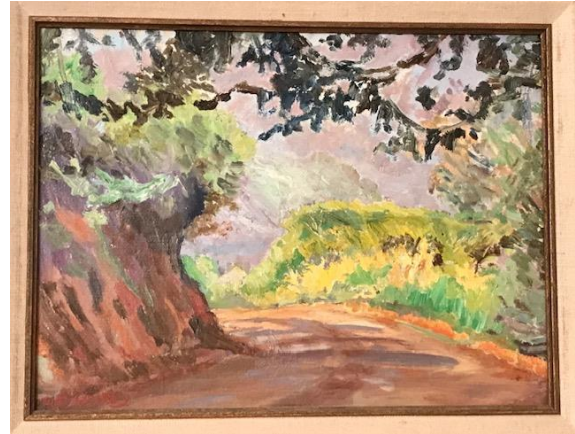
“I’m sorry, sir, but we don’t accept pets.”

The man thought a moment and then turned back toward the road and continued on the way he had been going with his dog.

After another long walk, and at the top of another long hill he came to a dirt road leading through a farm gate that looked as if it had never been closed.

There was no fence.

As he approached the gate, he saw a man inside, leaning against a tree reading a book.



“Excuse me! the Traveler called to the man. “Do you have any water?”

“I sure do,” said the man by the tree, there’s a pump over there, come on in.”

“How about my friend here?” the Traveler asked, gesturing to his dog.

“There should be a bowl by the pump.”

They went through the gate, and sure enough, there was an old-fashioned hand pump with a bowl beside it.

The traveler filled the water bowl and took a long drink himself, then he gave some to the dog.

When they were full, he and the dog walked back toward the man who was standing by the tree.

“What do you call this place?” the traveler asked.

“This is Heaven,” he answered.

“Well, that’s confusing,” the traveler said. “The man down the road said that was Heaven too.”

“Oh, you mean the place with the gold street and the pearly gates? Nope. That’s hell.”

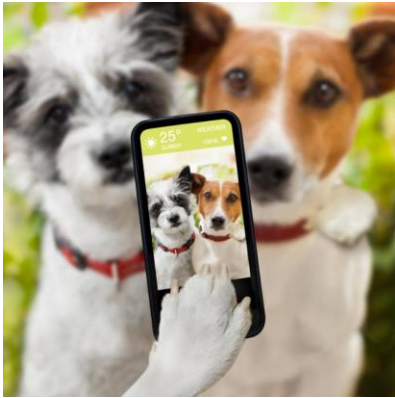
“Doesn’t make you mad for them to use your name like that?”

“No, the way I see it, we’re just happy that they screen out all the folks who would leave their best friends behind.”

II. Pets are our Companions

A. Our pets are our companions.

1. They provide for us unconditional love and support.
2. And we in turn provide for them food, and shelter and love.



B. I read on the **ASPCA Website** that as of last May, data from a poll of 5,020 respondents confirmed that close to **one in five households** acquired a CAT or a DOG since the beginning of the pandemic.

1. This would add up to approximately 23 million households based on the recent census.

2. And the vast majority of these households still have that pet in the home—90 percent for dogs and 85 percent for cats—and are not considering rehoming their pet in the near future.

3. Despite some alarmist headlines tied to regional reports of a surge in owner surrenders, this trend is not currently evident on a national level with many shelters simply seeing a return to pre-pandemic operations and intake.



B. This is because of the love and companionship that our animal friends can bring us – especially in times of trouble.

1. Matt Bershader, the President and CEO of the ASPCA said, “This incredibly stressful period motivated many people to foster and adopt animals, as well as further cherish the pets already in their lives, and our recent

research shows no significant risk of animals being rehomed by their owners now or in the near future as a result of the lifting of pandemic-related restrictions.”

2. He continues, “Pets are still providing their families with joy and comfort, regardless of changes in circumstances, and loving owners continue to recognize and appreciate the essential role pets play in their lives.”

3. So our pets are important figures in our lives.

4. We both love and care for one another and provide much needed companionship.

5. And it’s that same kind of companionship that we can bring to one another.

III. Taking God’s Love to the World

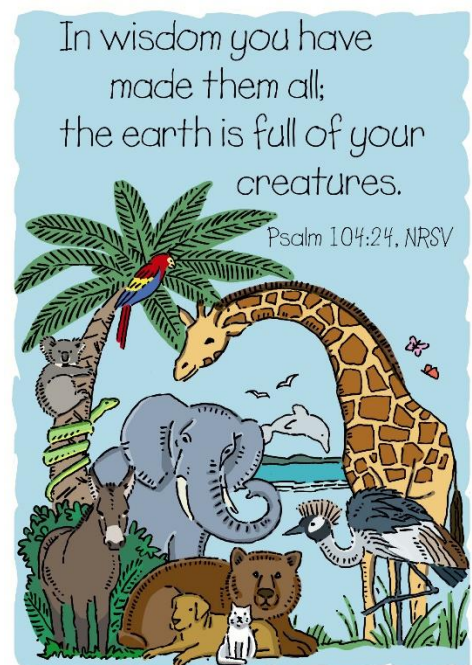
A. Our first reading today is from the **CREATION STORY** in **Genesis Chapter 1**, and tells the story of God creating all the animals – all the birds of the air, and fish in the sea, and everything that creeps upon the ground.

1. But in the **Second Chapter** of Genesis, we read of another **CREATION STORY**, where God says, “It is not good for the Man to be alone,” and creates all the animals to be humanity’s **COMPANIONS**.

2. Our Animal Friends **ARE GIFTS** – Gifts from the God who loves us and wants us to always have **LOVE** in our lives.

3. And so, in a very real way, our Pets are examples of God’s never failing love for us.

4. Our Pets give us love the way it is meant to be shared – free and without qualifications.



B. And that's also the way WE are to share GOD'S LOVE with the people we meet – we are to share it freely and without qualification.

1. A dog can do it – even a cat can do it, when they want to – all our Pets have their own special way to bring us God's love – so we won't be alone.

2. And we too, are called to share that same love with all God's children – freely and without qualification – that they too may know the gift of God' love in their lives.

Let Us Pray

O God, you have redeemed all creation
through the incarnation of your eternal Word;
Protect our pets, your creatures,
who provide us with joy and nonjudgmental companionship;
Give us respect for all of your redeemed creation,
that we may care for creation as just and humble stewards;
We pray this in the name of the same Word, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God,
now and forever. AMEN

David Bennett

