

“It’s A Dog’s Life”

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Creation I, Blessing of the Animals 4 October 2015

Genesis 1: 20 – 25, Luke 12: 22 - 31

When Jesus spoke to his listeners, he often used what he saw around him and spoke of the common life to illustrate his message. This morning, I would like to reflect upon what is my life to think about our lives.

My daughter, Krista, and her husband, Joe, were married seven weeks ago. As they were preparing their ceremony, they honored me when they asked if I would share a message. When I considered what I might say about marriage and relationships, I decided to settle on a piece that I have titled, “It’s a Dog’s Life”. That message is the basis of this morning’s sermon.

How many of you have pets? I had a cat and a dog when I was growing up but I was allergic to both, so I never formed a close bond. That was the extent of my pet connections until seven years ago when Krista went to the North Shore Animal Shelter in New York and came home with the cutest little brown miniature poodle whom she named Leila Beth. I was a bit surprised by her decision as she was living in an apartment in NYC at the time, had little financial resources to care for Leila and no experience at all in pet care. But it took little time for all of us to realize that it was a match made in heaven.

This was all fine as I lived in Livingston, NJ and Leila lived in NYC. Do not get me wrong, I liked Leila. When Krista would come to visit, Leila would always be at her side. I would pet Leila and take her for a walk and hold her for a little bit. But just like a grandchild, mom would head home with her dog and my wife and I were free to continue to enjoy the good life of an empty nest.

Well, that isn’t quite the whole story as my wife had a very different reaction to Leila than I did. In short, Heather fell head-over-heels in love with her. The love affair was instant and only grew deeper with each visit. I had a hunch I was in trouble.

To make a long story short, I finally realized that my wife needed someone or something to love on a daily basis. I didn’t quite fill the bill. One day, with great uncertainty, I announced that we needed to get a dog. After much discussion and many hours of searching we found what would become our third child; a Maltese female, aged 11 – 13, at a local rescue shelter. Previously owned by an animal hoarder, lined with rust spots from too much time in a cage, and scared of almost anything that moved, we brought home this eight pounds of fluff and named her Sophie Beth. It was love at first sight and I will openly admit that I have no idea what I was waiting

for – and that that little pup now has me wrapped around her little paw.

As we have prepared to celebrate the relationship between Joe and Krista, I have been thinking about the lessons that I have learned about relationships from Leila and Sophie. Our whole lives now revolve around Sophie. If we go to the shore, we can’t stay too late because we have to get home to feed the dog. If we visit our son and daughter-in-law’s house, we have to get home in time to take her for a walk. It was so much simpler when there were just two of us. Now we are connected to another and our lives are forever changed. We no longer can just think of ourselves – for we are responsible to another life. Relationships can do that to you.

Experiences and memories are better now – because of that relationship. We discovered that Sophie loves to walk on the beach. It is the time when we see her biggest and brightest smile. The beach will never be the same. Relationships make living and memories so much better.

And then there are the midnight runs to the animal hospital and the worry and the writing of the check and the relief as we take her home knowing that she would be OK. Relationships can indeed create stress and anxiety – and cost money sometimes, too.

Of course there are 3 AM wake-up calls and trips outside for a pee. If you own a pet you may know all too well the cleaning up after the accident on the floor, perhaps in the fog of a night’s sleep. This process is always followed by a firm, “pee pees belong outside,” which is then followed by a far less firm, “I love you Sophie.” Yes, relationships can be messy and there are times when we have to clean things up to the best of our abilities with hard work and forgiveness.

One of the times we love the best is when we pick Sophie up and just hold her on our laps. But Sophie is not much of a lap dog and after a minute or two she begins to get restless and we know that the lap time is over. We have to put her down so that she can head off to snuffle the floor to see if there is anything interesting to sniff. And that is so true of relationships, too. We need to have time to hug and hold each other tightly... and then there is time we need to let each other go to explore and grow and be our own person.

What does Sophie want from this relationship? Not much I think – and yet everything that really matters. When we have been out for few hours and we return,

Sophie, even with all the aches and pain of age, comes running and smiling, and dashes back and forth between us. All that she wants is some petting, some love, and a bite to eat. And maybe that is what really matters in a relationship – we want to know that we belong, to know that there is someone there for us. We want a safe place to lay our head and our hearts. We want to be nourished and cared for.

When I think of the wonderful welcome we receive from Sophie and Krista and Joe receive from Leila, I pause to think about the presence of God in our lives. It does not matter if we have been gone for ten minutes or

ten hours, the dogs are always so excited to welcome us home. So to it is with God. Whether we have been away for ten minutes, or ten hours, or ten days, or ten years, God is so excited when we come home. God welcomes us with open arms and love in God's heart. Our absence is forgiven. Our relationship is renewed.

Heather and I have agreed that Sophie and Leila are gifts from God, very precious gifts. And really, isn't that what our relationships with loved ones, with friends, with God – isn't that what relationships are ... wonderful, precious gifts from God?