



## RAISE THE LORD!

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.  
—Psalm 106:1

His name is Sylvester. He has a soft silky silver coat and white feet. Some would say he's *just* a barn cat. But what does that mean exactly?

As many of you know I have a lot of cats – 17 in all. My daughters say “Mom, don’t tell people ... they will think you are crazy!” The crazy cat lady! Crazy or not, 14 of these are barn cats.

One day... in the not so distant past, a feral mother had two kittens under an old wooden trailer in our backyard. Having compassion I fed them through the cold winter months. And like those old biblical stories ... ‘begetting’ began to happen all over the place. Thankfully, they are all now fixed... so the begetting should be finished.

Why am I telling you this? God speaks to us through his creation. And in my case, God speaks profusely. Jesus often used nature for the content of his teaching, especially in his parables. Jesus teaches me ... through nature and although I have no woolly sheep ... he often uses my cats for his illustrations.

Any farmer will tell you ... there is a natural rhythm to life on a farm. A rhythm ... of rising, feeding & watering, letting out ... maintaining grounds, fences and buildings ... to ensure the safety of those in your care. And at night ... there is bringing in, feeding, a quick once over to ensure all is well, and settling the animals in safely for the night. And then when darkness descends, listening with the window opened just a crook to ensure the sounds outside are ... as they ought to be.

On the farm there is birth, life, injury, sickness, and death... with new birth ... and the cycle continues. You are a witness to God’s created order – up close and personal. God does the life-giving and the growing but sometimes you are ‘called in’ to help in some way. On a farm there is no escaping the reality of the way things are – the cycle of life. The truth of ‘what is’.

Back to the cats ... in the evening I call the cats in from the barn... into the safety of the garage ... where they sleep on a cushy bed, eat lots of good food ... and I go out several times in the night to talk to them, and pet them. These I swear, are the most grateful and affectionate cats on planet earth. Oh I must tell you before you get the wrong impression, I am a dog person... but these cats have been working hard on me, in order to get me to change my status.

Each morning I let them out to play in the barn and fields. As the sun rises, I know as I open that door, that this could be the last time I see some of them. In nature, as in our own world ... ‘things happen’ ... coyotes, hawks and Mr. fox ... are also looking for breakfast and dinner.

I am reminded... to appreciate ‘what is’ in the here and now. As someone once coined ‘The Present’ is a gift from God. To recognize that ... to look around and to be grateful for the blessings we have right here ... right in front of us ... right now in our lives; is an important aspect of living our faith – having eyes to see.



That is one thing I love about caring for animals ... I must go out into God's world in all sorts of weather ... day in and day out ... to care for these creatures whether I am tired, or not. And in so doing, I have seen the most stunning sunrises and sunsets. I have seen shooting stars. I have heard the beautiful music only rustling leaves can make. I have heard choirs of birds sing. I have seen the hawk fly, the snake slither ... and I have felt the breath of God caress my face as the wind swirls around me.

What has Jesus taught me through my experiences on the farm? We humans, as much as we like to think we are - we are not in control ... God is. As one watches the dynamics of nature and how it all interacts with the variety and complexity of life ... one sees how fragile and precious life is. There is also a peace and tranquility standing in the presence of God in the midst of all this and savouring 'what is' 'right now'.

Sometimes we stand in difficult or painful places; and in these times we need only to stop, be still and notice; that we are not alone in it. God is with us, and all around us. Sometimes God will send someone or something, maybe even a barn cat into our life to remind us of this 'truth'.

Why did I begin this letter with Sylvester? He is one of my most affectionate cats. I love him dearly. While I was on vacation ... he went missing. Upon my return, night after night I went into the dark to call him, with only a prayer and a flashlight to guide my way. And then, to my delight and surprise ... on arriving home from church and the John Sands concert Sunday night ... he came running through the pitch black, meowing from the barn. My heart soared and my gratitude overflowed.

He is *only* a barn cat. And yet, he brings joy into my life ... you see the 'God piece for me' is this ... a wild cat, who responds to love and becomes a part of the rhythm of my life...and my life becoming a part of the rhythm of his, is something very special ... almost sacred. Have you ever tried to get close to a wild cat? Try picking one up and have it lean into you purring. On some level for me, this is a miracle and a gift – from God to me – and I am grateful. We don't/can't own something wild ... if we are lucky, we may get to share life with it.

How often we can take for granted the gifts God gives us ... just think when we walk into a grocery store and the shelves are piled high and lined with food. Do we take it for granted? Or do we thank God for providing? Just think when we have had a bad day ... and we come home to a roof over our head, and if we are lucky enough, people or friends to share it with. How many times a day in the course of our life do we just take for granted 'someone' or 'something' will just be there. Ought we not to thank God daily, minute by minute for the awesome blessings we receive by God's grace? Things we see every day in the ordinary course of life... that don't look all that magnificent, that is, until you really start thinking about how they bless your life.

And here we are, in this beautiful house of God, we call St. Andrew Anglican Church – a crazy lady with too many cats – and a whole community of believers Christ beckons us to love, as he loves us. We are family ... but try as we might ...we can never love as much as God does. God is an awesome God ... who reigns from Heaven above ... and in Him we live, move and have our being. God cherishes each and every one of us; and I believe *even* Sylvester and his clan.

I pray that you have a wonderful Thanksgiving, and that through faith ... your eyes are opened, no matter where you stand today ... to see God in the creatures, in nature, in those around you ... and that you can feel his deep abiding love for you. I pray that your heart overflows with gratitude for the One who created all of this, and you too!

Thank you for supporting the work of God, in this His Church. Thank you for being a part of this wonderful family of God – a Holy people. Thank you for being a blessing to others. But most of all Thanks be to God!

God's Love and Blessings,

The Rev. S. Kim McArthur, Parish Priest

Thanksgiving 2010