

## St Francis Day and Blessing of the Pets

*Genesis 1:24-27; Psalm 148:7-14; Galatians 6:14-18; John 14:1-7*

Because my husband Peter is a geologist, for a 10-year period of our lives we used to go to the Northern Territory and live in tents for 3-4 months each year in the middle of the areas Pete and a team were geologically mapping for Australia. We went in the dry season up north, which is winter here. We had to take everything we needed to live right out in the outback perhaps 5-8 hours from the nearest town.

One year we got off the plane in Darwin with one of the single men who was travelling with just one bag and as I stood there with a 3 month old baby strapped in a pouch, firmly holding the hand of a toddler, Peter kept going back and forth to the baggage trolley collecting the usual essentials for basic living in the bush for three months, such as the stroller, the travel cot, and various bags. Then the man, who was pretty shocked at all this gear piling up around me suddenly said: "Oh no, no!" I turned around to see Peter bring over our dog on the lead that he then put in my one free hand while he went back to get the dog cage off the trolley. And this poor chap is still saying "No, Not the dog too!!"

The dog was part of our family and she went where the family went. This particular member of our family was an Irish setter, called Tara.

Many people rubbished Tara saying she was dumb & scatter brained, as Irish Setters are thought to be. And she didn't always do anything to improve that image – in the city. However, whenever we went bush, each year, Tara was transformed into a model dog – mostly.

Our camp sites – ie where we lived – were always on a river and abounded in wildlife. We'd see every variety of bird, from Jabirus flying in to most of the varieties of Kingfishers, to fruit bats (ugg!!) to all types of animals – including water buffalo in those days, fresh water crocodiles, to every type of spider, including a huge one that ate birds. And lots of snakes and other reptiles.

Each day a big goanna walked through our camp at the same time of day – as if he had a clock. Tara would bark at him all the way along the river bank loving the game that it was. The goanna was not the least bit fazed by Tara – he knew he owned this section of river and nothing would change his routine – and Tara was smart enough to know not to get in his way.

One evening as our baby was feeding, a deadly King Brown snake started to move from a clump of bamboo towards our tent. Now the tent like most only had one entrance and so only the one and same exit **and** the snake was coming straight towards that. The thought of being inside that confined space

with an aggressive snake – sorry a really aggressive snake – and two littlies and myself was pretty frightening.

Tara dashed into action and kept running circles around the snake until the children and I got right away.

She saved us.

This happened a second time later that night too. Peter was out of base camp for the week mapping, and the children and I were in a tent too far along the river bank for anyone to hear us call out. There was only a skeleton crew around during the week: The cook, the mechanic and the draughtsman and the children and myself.

Tara our dog warned us of the danger and then protected us from the snake until we all got to safety. Somehow Tara's instinct was far beyond what we expected of her breed. There was something in her, deep inside that rose to the occasion. There was a knowing of how to act.

That is how we are made too. Our first reading today reminded us that we are made in the image of God. We have that something in us – part of our DNA that knows, seeks, searches for and responds to our Creator. Our lives here on earth are actually a quest for what is somehow known inside.

Some people feel worthless, that they are no use to anyone, a bit like people used to say about our dog. But our dog found her potential in a crisis. Besides being a loyal & faithful companion she proved her usefulness when it mattered.

For us God doesn't look at what we do but at who we are to Him. The truth is that we are made in God's image and there is no way we can be worthless. We are precious and valuable beyond compare.

Psalm 139 says: *"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."* (vv 13-14) that is us – every one of us!

Our lives here on earth are meant to be for discovering and finding out our true purpose in life. Remember life continues on after this life. It would be foolish really not to prepare for a life that will go on forever compared to just living a life that ends in say 80 or so years.

Our purpose is to know God and be known by God.

And the good news is that God is easily found.

God sent His Son to show us what He is like and to show us the way to our eternal future. If we know Jesus, the Son of God, then we know the Father – as our Bible verse tells us in the second reading. And the Way to God is easy too – it is Jesus. Jesus says to us: “I am the Way...” John 14:6. See it on the third last line of our Gospel reading. Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

It is in and through Jesus we find our eternal purpose and potential.

I encourage each of us here not to wait till there is a crisis to follow what is implanted in each of us by our being created in the image of God, by the One who made each so wonderfully.

We are all precious to Him and He longs for us to know Him and be known by Him.

How do we do that?

It is simple – by asking.

Looking at the Galatians reading – it is short and to the point.

The only thing worth boasting about is the Cross – it has opened the way to heaven. And when we turn to Jesus we become a new creation.

As we are a new creation – let’s live like it – not like the world – which as Paul knew is important to have crucified in us.

Yesterday at Christ Church Hawker, the Rev’d John Chapman spoke a little on what the new creation is like. It is a place where we are told in Rev 21 there is no more pain, no more hunger, no more tears. It is a place we are told in Isaiah 2 and 11 that the swords will be made into ploughshares and the lion will eat with the ox; the child will play near a cobra’ den or put a hand into a viper’s nest.

‘Chappo’ reminded us that we have only about 80 years to prepare for this new creation in eternity and not to waste our preparation time.

He made it clear that if we don’t live under Jesus’ Lordship now here on earth we won’t in heaven.

I sum up what he was saying as: Make the choice to have Jesus as our Lord now and then live and act like it – so it is not just words.

Words without action are meaningless.

At the Blessing of the Animals I will invite people to pray a prayer about turning to Jesus and asking Him into their lives. Here amongst those who have followed Jesus for some time I challenge myself, and all of us, with the question:

Is Jesus our life or do we fit Him into our lives?

He said: "**I am the Way**" – is He really for you and me?

He said: "**I am the Truth**" – is He really or do we believe all sorts of things?

And He said: "**I am the Life**" – is He really our life – totally and completely?

Let each of us ponder this question and today pray our own personal prayer after a time of silence.

So to each of us:

**Is Jesus my Life or do I fit Him into my life?**