



RAINING CATS AND DOGS: ANIMAL WELFARE SUNDAY

PURPOSE

The purpose of these materials is to provide a resource for youth leaders to engage with Animal Welfare Sunday and to introduce the concept of care for our fellow creatures as part of our Christian responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS ANIMAL WELFARE SUNDAY?

Animal Welfare Sunday is a day in the Church's calendar on which we take time to think more deeply about our fellow creatures. On Animal Welfare Sunday, we address issues of the well-being of non-human animals, the suffering that human activity causes to our fellow creatures, and our responsibility as Christians to alleviate suffering and promoting the welfare of all of God's creatures. We also take time to think about the place of animals in God's Kingdom.

Each year, there is a theme for Animal Welfare Sunday, focussing on a particular animal welfare issue. This year, our theme is Raining cats and dogs, and we look at the place of cats and dogs in our lives, and the particular problems of over-breeding and stray and unwanted dogs and cats.

WHY ON THIS SUNDAY?

Animal Welfare Sunday is the Sunday nearest St Francis' Day. St Francis is the patron saint of animals, and was well-known for his concern for all of God's creatures, both human and non-human, as can be seen in these excerpts from Thomas of Celano's Life of St Francis of Assisi:

"It is truly remarkable how even irrational creatures recognised his affection for them, and sensed the tenderness of his love. Once, for example, when he was staying at the hill town of Greccio, one of the brothers brought him a live baby hare that had been caught in a snare. When the saint saw it, he was moved with pity and said: 'Come to me, brother leveret, Why did you allow yourself to be caught out like this?' As soon as the hare was released by the brother that was holding it, it took refuge with Francis and without any coaxing lay peacefully in his lap, knowing it was absolutely safe...He was moved by the same compassion for fish. When people caught fish, if he had the chance he would throw them back into the water, warning them to avoid being caught next time...Francis overflowed with charity, and he felt pity not only for men in need, but also for dumb animals, reptiles, birds, and all other creatures, whatever their intelligence."

from Thomas of Celano, First Life of ST Francis of Assisi,
translated by Christopher Stace (2000, pp61 & 75)



WORSHIP RESOURCES



GAME

'What breed am I?' On post-it notes, write the names of different breeds of dogs and cats. Put a post-it on each person's back (without letting them see it). They then need to ask questions of others in the group to guess what breed they are. An example:

Husky

Q: Am I a dog?	A: Yes
Q: Am I small?	A: No
Q: Am I large?	A: Yes
Q: Am I a working dog?	A: Yes
Q: Do I herd sheep?	A: No
Q: Am I a retriever?	A: No
Q: Do I pull a sled?	A: Yes
Q: Am I a husky?	A: Yes

DISCUSSION

OUR OWN EXPERIENCE

Ask the group who has (or has ever had) a pet of some kind. What kind of pet do/did they have? How do/did they feel about their pet? What does/did the pet bring to the family (love, companionship, etc)?

It's probable that not everyone in the group will have had a pet. They may wish to discuss the experience they do have of animals (friends' pets, animals on tv, etc). As observers, what do they see when they encounter people with pets?

HOW WE THINK ABOUT CATS AND DOGS

Get the group to list the character traits that they associate with cats and dogs (intelligence, loyalty, etc). When the list is finished, ask them to decide which traits are positive and which are negative. Which do we, as a culture, tend to emphasise the most? Discuss the effect this might have on our attitudes towards cats and dogs.



WORSHIP RESOURCES



A FEW KEY FACTS

A study published in the journal *Veterinary Record* estimated that 10,522,186 dogs and 10,332,955 cats were household pets in the UK in 2006 {Murray JK, Browne WJ, Roberts MA, et al. 2010. Number and ownership profiles of cats and dogs in the UK. *Veterinary Record* 166(6): 163-8.}.

According to the Celia Hammond Animal Trust, there are an estimated 2 million stray cats in the UK, though the true figure may be even higher {Celia Hammond Animal Trust. http://www.celiahammond.org/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE_user_op=view_page&PAGE_id=29&MMN_position=50:50. Accessed 18 July 2012}.

In 2006, there were estimated to be just over 100,000 stray dogs in the UK {Tasker L. 2008. Stray animal control practices (Europe). A report into the strategies for controlling stray dog and cat populations adopted in thirty-one countries}.

That number is probably higher now.

Ask the group what they think about these facts - what does it say about our society that we allow so many animals to become homeless?

FILM CLIPS

Simon's Cat in The Box

<http://www.simonscat.com/Films/The-Box/>

Discuss the characteristics of cats that are depicted in this film, particularly curiosity and playfulness. Point out that Simon's cat seems to delight in a very simple and ordinary thing - the cardboard box. We often talk of adult cats being 'kittenish' in their play. Discuss Jesus' words to his disciples, 'You must become like little children to enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18.3). How can the kittenish play of cats remind us to be childlike in our lives?

The Artist

DVD/blu-ray chapter 2, 'The Name's Miller', time index 10.00 to 11.07
(scene at the breakfast table, ending at the end of the scene)

AND

DVD/blu-ray chapter 9, 'Stupid pride', time index 1.09.12 to 1.13.22
(scene in which Valentin destroys burns his films, ending with the words of the police officer who rescues him from the fire)

Discuss the qualities of the character George Valentin's and Uggie's relationship. You may wish to focus on these questions: How does Valentin feel about Uggie? What traits do we see in Uggie's behaviour? How do they each benefit from the relationship? Based on these two scenes, which of them is the most Christ-like towards the other?

Cats and dogs (and other animals) can teach us important lessons about God and his kingdom. Jesus knew this and used animals in his parables. If we recognise this, should we also treat animals with particular respect? What does it say about God's relationship with animals that we can, at times, see in them Christ-like qualities?





DISCUSSION AND BIBLE STUDY

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

British law says that people who keep pets have certain responsibilities towards their animals, including preventing suffering and harm to their animals, and making sure that an animal's needs are met. Under the law, an animal's needs include the need for a suitable environment and a suitable diet, the need to exhibit their normal behaviour and appropriate companionship, and the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

What do the group think of this? Is it right that the law imposes these responsibilities? Should the law go further?

Although it doesn't mention dogs and cats specifically, the Bible also says that we have certain responsibilities towards other creatures. This starts with the two creation stories in Genesis.

"God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'" (Genesis 1.28)

What is meant by 'dominion'? Does it allow us to use and exploit other animals? Elsewhere in the Bible, human dominion (as in the case of Israel's kings) is supposed to be a reflection of God's rule. In other words, there is a responsibility to protect and care for those over whom we have authority.

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." (Genesis 2.15).

The Hebrew word that we translate as 'to till' (or, in some translations, 'to work') can also mean 'to serve'. If God created man to serve and to care for the garden and its inhabitants, what responsibility does that give us towards other creatures?

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." (Psalm 24.1).

The earth and its creatures are not ours to use as we wish, but belong to God.

Ask the group what they think about these verses. Is humanity exercising our dominion over other creatures the way we should? Do we have a responsibility to serve and care for the earth and its creatures as part of our service to God?

Other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures mention specific requirements to take care of domestic animals.

"When you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back.

When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free." (Exodus 23.4-5).

The Law that God gave to his people the Israelites says that a person must show care and compassion even to the animals of an enemy.



WORSHIP RESOURCES



“For six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief.” (Exodus 23.12a).

The Sabbath exists not only to give rest to humans, but to prevent people from exploiting and over-working their domestic animals. God cares about the way we treat the animals that we keep as part of our own households.

Ask the group what they think about these verses. Can we apply their principles to our treatment of dogs and cats? What responsibilities do we have if we keep an animal as part of our household?

At the end of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus tells his followers: ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation’ (Mark 16.15).

Ask the group what they think this means. How can we proclaim the Gospel, or good news, to the non-human parts of creation?

SUMMING UP

If we are to share the Gospel (the ‘Good News’) with all creation, we must do so through our actions as well as our words. How we treat our fellow creatures should be a reflection of how God treats us – with love, gentleness and care, even at great cost to himself.

