

Come, Sunday

Homily by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan

October 23, 2022

Monday morning is usually one of my favorite times of the week. It is when I take my day off and spend time with my beloved equine animal friends – horses, donkeys, and mules, all of whom are finding sanctuary in a safe environment while they recover from various things and wait to find their next “forever home.” Many of you know this about my weekly routines.

This Monday, however, I didn’t want to go. It had been a long time since I had a sleep-in Monday. My husband and I had gotten COVID boosters the night before. I had hoped I might just feel “bad enough” that I could call off my volunteer duties that morning.

I wasn’t feeling well and easily could have justified staying home with a warm cup of tea, but something got me out the door. As I now understand it, an act of grace had me pull on barn boots and gloves and head over to the farm.

Once there, I fell into my typical routine and nearly forgot that I almost hadn’t come. Everything was normal, until I got over to the right-hand side of the pastures, where I immediately sensed something was awry. My footsteps slowed, almost of their own accord. I paused, buckets of grain in hand. Something was different.

The air was still. Nothing was moving. The animals, normally precocious, offered me none of their customary neighing and braying, expressing their eagerness to have their breakfast. Instead, to an animal, their heads hung low.

I opened the gate to the paddock where the miniature donkeys were staying, only to find that one had died in the night. Its pocket-size body lay waiting to be found. I immediately realized that all of the animals knew, even the sheep. Their heads hung out of respect.

I knelt next to the animal and called the owner of the farm. As I waited for her to come, I suddenly realized this donkey’s mate was nowhere in sight. I went into the small shelter in the paddock and found the other miniature donkey standing in the back of the shed, shaking.

I later learned that she was the mother of the one who had died. I spent hours with her that

morning, just holding her head as she leaned into my pelvic bowl, resting all her weight on my body. We prayed. We walked. We stopped. We cried and we loved. Just like any two people would do. I was honored and in awe to be with her during this time, and my heart ached for her. There is no separation between God’s creations.

I later learned that her name was Sunday. In the days to come, volunteers rallied around her, spending time with her and walking her. She didn’t want to eat, so we fed her molasses in chopped hay – making it taste sweet and stick to her bones. We weren’t sure if she would pull out of this, so we loved her all the more.

This went on for few weeks, until last Monday. When I walked up to the fence to feed her breakfast, she opened her miniature donkey mouth quite wide, showed her buck teeth, and brayed uproariously, as if to say, “Hey! Where’s my grain?”

She’s happy again, though I suspect she will always remember her child and continue to love her. The sheep are their normal persnickety selves, and the other animals no longer hang their heads.

Sunday is not alone in carrying that memory. I also carry it. It was a spiritual experience we shared that morning. The mother donkey and I were two beings coming together in a time of agonizing pain. I will never be the same. My love for animals including their wisdom, their inter-connection, and their love for each other is great, as it is for humans.

Amen and blessed be.

We will now move into the part of our service where we remember animals we have loved and lost, those who have died and live on in our hearts.

If you have a photograph and would like it to be blessed and your animal remembered, please come forward.

After each name, invite the congregation to say, *“In loving memory we honor (name or names), all you learned from them, and everything they brought to your lives.”*