

161. BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS - MONDAY - OCTOBER 5, 2026

Good morning, Grace Harbor – it's Dan. Happy Monday!

I woke up early this morning because I was so excited to tell you about yesterday. It was our annual Blessing of the Animals.

We do it on the Sunday nearest World Animal Day, which corresponds with the celebration of St. Francis of Assisi. He's known as the patron saint of animals because he had such a deep love for them.

We had our regular church service in the morning, and then mid-afternoon, we headed down to the Village Green where everyone was invited to bring an animal they love. Most people brought pets. We got lots of dogs, a handful of mostly uncooperative cats, some birds, hamsters, a snake or two, and Fern even brought one of her goats from the farm.

It was an absolutely beautiful day. It was clear and warm, especially in the sun. Then add in a bunch of adorable animals and proud owners, and you've got a recipe for a good time – with a little chaos tossed in, for sure.

We took a chance and brought our young golden retriever, Luke. He's almost two years old, and you might remember from last spring that we've been working with him on managing his excitement and greeting people without

knocking them over. He did great for about... the first four minutes. But when he saw the goat, it was just too much. His joy overflowed, shall we say, and my wife had to take him home. Our 3-year-old went with her, but my daughter hung around.

I noticed that she got in line, even though Luke had already gone home. When she got to the front, she asked, "This is the blessing of the *animals*, right? It doesn't just have to be pets?"

"That's right," I replied.

"Ok," she said, and then she pointed over my shoulder toward the pond. "I tried to get the Quackersons to come over here with some bread, but they just took it and swam away. Can you bless them from here?"

"Of course I can!" I said with a smile. I turned and extended my hands toward the pond and prayed, "Dear God, pour out your blessing upon Mr. and Mrs. Quackerson, Leona, Quack, and all their siblings who have found other ponds. We are grateful that they are a part of our lives. May they feel your love and grace through the way we care for them. Amen."

She was thrilled and skipped away to join some kids who were sitting on a nearby picnic bench watching the parade of animals.

Toward the end of the line, there was a young boy – I'd guess he was probably 5 or 6 years old. When it was his

turn, he marched right up to me, and very confidently held up his two hands cupped together. And sitting in his hands was not something furry. Not something scaly. Not something slimy. But something cold, hard, and smooth. He had brought... a rock.

"This is Rocky," he said. "He's not an animal, but he is my pet, and I love him. I'm pretty sure he's granite. I found him in a river. My mom says that's why he's so smooth."

"Well," I replied. "Nice to meet you, Rocky! It would be my honor to offer you this blessing."

And then I prayed the same prayer that I'd been praying for all of the animals: "Dear God, pour out your blessing upon Rocky. We are grateful that he is a part of our lives. May he feel your love and grace through the way we care for him. Amen."

Rocky may not have been an animal, but it was clear he meant a lot to this young boy. Plus, God made and loves *all* creation, and the blessing of God is not something we have to earn. It's not a prize we win. It's naming out loud the love that God already has for all of us and gives freely.

I wonder if you have anything like Rocky that's special to you but might not seem like a big deal to anyone else. Maybe it's a favorite toy or stuffy. Maybe it's a game ball or trophy you earned playing a sport. Or maybe it's something that someone you love gave to you. Go ahead and

share your thing and why it's special to you. If you need more time, you can pause the podcast, and I'll be right here when you get back.

[PAUSE]

Now, I love animals, and getting to meet so many of them filled my joy tank. But when I was doing bed time with my daughter, I thought she seemed a bit quiet.

"Did you have fun at the blessing of the animals?" I asked.

"I did..." and then she paused. "Well, until the end."

"Hmmm... tell me more," I said gently.

"Well, I was with those other kids by the picnic table, and there were three older boys – I think they're fifth graders. When they saw the little kid with the rock, they started making fun of him. I mean, I get that a rock is not an animal, but he wasn't hurting anyone, was he?"

"No, he wasn't," I replied.

"I thought it was kind of cool that he brought that rock," she continued. "And I mean, they weren't being loud. I don't think anyone else heard them. But I heard them, and..."

She trailed off, and I could see tears welling in her eyes.

Then she said, "I wanted to say something, but I didn't. They were older than me, and I got nervous. I didn't do anything. I just stood there."

I didn't say anything right away, but then I said, "But you **did** do something, honey. You told me."

"Well," she said, "the boy didn't hear it, so I guess everything's fine. I just know that I wouldn't want anyone talking about me or something I love like that."

"Of course you wouldn't," I said. "And **he** may not have heard them, but you did. It seems like it still hurt, and that matters."

That seemed to be enough for the night, but I wonder if you noticed what she said. **I wouldn't want anyone talking about me or something I love like that.** You know what that sounds like to me? The Golden Rule.

You know, for the last four weeks, we've been exploring what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. But Jesus also tells us that it's just as important to love others as we love ourselves, which is a lot like the Golden Rule.

Ok, let's close in prayer. If you want to, you can close your eyes and fold your hands.

Dear God, we thank you for all of your blessings, whether they're things that are easy to love – like adorable animals – or they're things that may only be special to us.

When we see things we don't understand, help us remember to respond the way we would want others to act toward us – with questions instead of laughter. Amen.

Ok, Grace Harbor, have a great Monday, and I'll talk to you tomorrow.

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