
I Don't Like Cats, But I Do Care For Them

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Feast of St. Francis

We celebrate the Feast of St. Francis today, bringing all sorts of dogs and courageous cats, and other animals, into the Cathedral for our blessing. Blessings to them!

But I have a confession to make on this day of animal love. I don't like cats! I do like cat lovers, and I like dog lovers. But cats, maybe not. The title of my sermon on this St. Francis Day is, "I Don't Like Cats, But I Do Care For Them."

Here is my story about cats. I grew up on a farm, and I took care of animals all the time. But they were always outdoor animals, even the cats. I kept dogs inside the house only when they were puppies, and when they were sleeping next to my bed when I was a boy. After they were a few weeks old, they went outside. And they had their own house. That is why we used to have doghouses! What happened to them? But that is another story.

My story today is about cats, and about a particular cat. As I said, I don't like cats. But I do care for them. My father didn't like cats either; that, too, is another story.

From time to time, one of my sisters would have a cat. I didn't like it. But I tolerated it. Fine. My father and I got used to it.

Then, when I had children of my own, my daughter decided she wanted a cat. We were living in Cumming, Georgia, at the time. My wife drove my daughter and my daughter's best friend to get a little kitten from the shelter. On the way home, the two girls were sitting in the way back of the Suburban, trying to decide what name to give the little cat. The girls were maybe 6 or 7 years old. Um, 6 ...7. The friend said, "Well, you can name the cat after me. You can name the cat my name! My daughter thought that was an excellent idea, and she named the cat, "Julie."

She couldn't wait for Julie to have kittens. A few days later, my wife informed my daughter that she didn't think Julie would be having kittens. Julie was a boy cat.

So what. Those were the early days of transgender identity, and we made our way. I don't like cats, but I do care for them. This cat, Julie, really made her way. I mean "his" way.

A few months later, we were on the back deck of our Cumming house, a deck which was maybe twenty feet off the ground. Julie fell off the railing; and we thought she was done. Too bad, I said. Nope, he hopped right back up, rose up, and lived again. The cat came back.

We moved to Columbia, South Carolina, and Julie The Cat could not resist getting in our way at every step. She was underfoot as we moved in, carrying boxes to and fro, unloading and loading, up into the attic and down the stairs. A few days later, someone noticed that Julie was missing. Where was she? We thought, maybe she was just getting used to the neighborhood. No sign.

The next day, I was with my wife in our second floor bedroom, and we heard a strange sound. A sort of scratching sound that seemed to be coming from inside the wall. What in the world? And then we heard more. A kind of meowing sound. "Meow."

Oh, my Lord! How did Julie get behind the wall? I went up to the attic and heard the sound more clearly. I crawled over and through the itchy fiberglass insulation, all the way to the eave, where the roof comes down to the inside wall. I peered over the edge, about eight feet down, and there she was. Julie the Cat was between the outside wall of the house in the inside wall of our bedroom. She had been trapped in the attic, after we had closed the door days before.

"Here, kitty, kitty, kitty!" I used my softest and kindest voice to coax her up. But, of course, she couldn't have climbed up even if she had wanted to. What to do?! I then came up with one of the most brilliant ideas of my life. I don't have too many of those. I got a long rope, and I tied a narrow basket to end of the rope. I put some cat food in the basket. Then, while lying on stomach in the insulation, at the edge of the attic floor, I lowered the basket down between the walls to the anxious and frantic cat.

"Here, kitty, kitty, kitty." I don't like cats, but I do care for them. I was being very sincere, and, still, Julie was having nothing to do with me. Nevertheless, I persisted. My children, behind me in the attic, were cheering me on and trying to provide positive influence to a cat. Finally, after what seemed like hours, Julie gingerly climbed into the basket.

Victory! Julie the Cat had survived another scare and was being raised to rescue.

Her troubles persisted in South Carolina. She (I mean "He") showed up later with a broken leg. We took her to the veterinarian, who said it looked like she had been shot. What?! We cared for her, and she spent two months with a lovely little purple cast on her back leg. But she survived. The cat came back.

No, I didn't like cats, but I did care for Julie. At an older age, Julie the Cat even survived the trip to Atlanta. She got used to still another house. This time, sadly, she developed some sort of kidney disease, and my family administered IV medicine to him, or her. We all cared for Julie. When she died, I think my daughter scattered her ashes in all sorts of places. She survived all sorts of places, and her ashes are now scattered in all sorts of places.

This is why we bless animals today. Our pets, and all animals, whether we like them or not, give us all a sense of life. That is their gift to us. I actually grew to like Julie – sometimes—because our animals give us a chance to practice life.

With animals, we practice. We practice care. We practice mercy. We practice love with our pets. And the world needs more of that practice! Glory to God for the animals around us! Glory to God even for the animals that we don't think we like. God loves them, and God loves us. Praise God for teaching us how to practice care, how to practice mercy, how to practice love.

AMEN.