

Scripture: Psalm 8

Sermon Title: "Hero's Sermon"

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As many of you know, when Mason and I met, I became the proud dog dad of a now nearly 3-year old American pit bull terrier and his name is Hero – here is a picture I have of him lying in the grass by a picnic table looking all cute. Anyway, as we have been approaching this Blessing of the Animals Service, I have been thinking about what lessons Hero would teach us and wondering what Divine wisdom has been placed in this creation of God. After all, when something is created, a bit of the Creator is naturally left within it. And while I have been reflecting on what Hero may teach us and also thinking about our scripture lesson for today from the Psalms which reminds us as humans of our role in having dominion over creation, particularly over the animals, it hit me – Hero just like many of the pets in our lives, see us, see the humans in their lives, a bit like a god! Right? I mean, let's think about it? Who does Hero literally follow? His humans. Who does Hero aim to please? His humans. Who does Hero go to for his daily bread – in his case in the form of kibble and the occasion treat from the dinner plates? His humans. Who teaches Hero right from wrong? His humans sure try.

Now I know, on the surface this may sound a bit strange, but I believe our scripture today really lines us up to think about this. In our Psalm, it starts with this reminder of God, the Sovereign, the ruler of all, and we are reminded of God's majesty. And then the Psalmist goes on to acknowledge the role of humanity in creation, using words of being a little lower than God, having dominion, meaning sovereignty – that same word that was just used for God, having this sort of role in creation, particularly naming in the lives of animals. Why would the psalmist want us to think about this? Why would they want us to think about this structure they seem to build of God ruling over humanity and humanity ruling over the animals? One possibility that comes to my

mind and the one I wish to explore with you today is this: that we should learn from our God how to care for the animals and we should learn from the animals how to follow our God.

So, believing in a loving, caring, gracious God, we should love, care, and be gracious toward the creatures in our world and how we believe that God sees and treats us, we should strive to do the same with the animals in our lives, treating them with dignity and respect. Now, we could certainly delve into that more, how does God's role in our lives impact how we should care for creation, but today I want us to focus more on what we can learn from the animals in how we follow our God. So today's sermon is not so much mine, but it is more a sermon from our dog, Hero. And for those of you who have pets, you can probably glean your own lessons from them as well.

The first thing we learn from Hero is to love. Hero is a cuddly dog who loves giving licks and kisses. His love is unconditional. He always is looking to spend time with us as he follows from room to room. He always wants to be close – if you are on the couch, he wants to be on the couch. That's how Hero loves us so how should we love God? We of course should love of God in the same unconditional way. We should want to spend intentional time with God, in prayer, in meditation, in constant awareness of God's presence in every moment of life. That's Hero lesson #1!

Hero's lesson #2 is to listen and learn. Hero is, for the most part, a good listener. I emphasize most part because there are times when he sure doesn't want to hear what we have to say. For humanity, listening to God's voice revealed in scripture and through the moving of the Holy Spirit should be our goal and we should acknowledge that we too have trouble listening sometimes, especially when it is not exactly what we want to hear. In this same vein, Hero would also remind us that we need to learn more, not just for ourselves but for others. Hero is not here today because he can get a little overwhelmed with large crowds, too many people to try and lick and love, and sadly he

is not the greatest with other dogs unless he was brought up around them. His humans would love for this to change and I know he wants to please us so as we continue to train him, he will work hard to make this possible. We should also want to learn from our God, the things that need to change in our lives we should work on them with God's help, so that we can live a better life, not just for ourselves but for everyone. We should be open to hearing where God is leading us from ways that may cause harm to others and calling us into new ways of being that are full of life.

The third Hero lesson I will leave with you is to enjoy life. His humans sure get a kick out of seeing him play with his favorite rope and squeaky toys! When we moved into our new house, he found a basketball which he quickly deflated but has continued to provide him hours of enjoyment when playing fetch outside! We love to see him just enjoying the sunshine and even cuddling up close on the couch. I believe God loves to see us enjoying life as well. Yes, working toward love, listening to our God, learning to be better and do better, and also finding time to enjoy the blessings of this life. Because the one other thing that Hero and other animals reminds us is that life is too short to not enjoy it. For Hero's breed, he has an estimated life expectancy of 12-14 years. A reality that I know many of us are familiar with, especially for those who have loved pets who have passed on from this life. So, in the midst of all that life does bring, life is too short to not find time to enjoy it and to create good memories with those whom we love.

Beloved People of God, there are many more lessons that we could learn here and I think if we opened it up to your comments, we could be here all-day learning from the best and worst habits of the animals in our lives. Especially if we began talking about the lessons from cats, who yes often notoriously have a reputation for doing what they want and being a bit stubborn, but also have a curious spirit, a way of taking time for themselves, and a playful spirit no matter their age. But we won't delve into that further this morning. We will leave our thoughts with Hero's sermon as I encourage us all to consider the lessons we can learn from the animals around us. And so, throughout this

life that we share together with the furry, finned, feathered, and otherwise garbed animal friends, may we follow where I believe the Psalmist is leading us today and embrace them like God embraces us. May we too learn from them as we follow and serve the God who loves us unconditionally. And all God's critters say, "Amen."