

Year C*Easter 7*2010*Good Dog!

Hey friends. What a great week. Yesterday was a delightful wedding as we celebrated the union of Whitney Kitchell and Cade Laverty. Thursday we celebrated the Ascension of our Lord and Savior. And Monday morning our old dog Taffy died in his sleep.

We got Taffy from the Human Society fourteen years ago. If ever there was a pound puppy it was Taffy. He was some combination of Yellow Lab, German Shepherd, and Television Room Ottoman.

Do you remember the dog in Disney's Beauty and the Beast that is turned into a footstool. Add about 90 pounds and you got Taffy. Spenser Hallmark once. . .

Taffy was the subject of a sermon or two over the past decade and a half. He was a sweet boy and a good dog. We all know how important our animals become to us. A dog can be so important. Or a cat. Or a horse. I had a Palomino Quarter Horse named Feather it's still difficult for me to speak about. At different times I have loved them all.

In this case it is a dog.

I remember the day Taffy got out and ran down into town and terrorized children in the park. He wasn't at all cruel. He just liked knocking children over. My diminutive Megan was Taffy's specialty. But he would joyously jump up and knock anyone down. This was before the days of cable TV and the Dog Whisperer. My kids loved it because you could also knock Taffy over without him caring. Turn about was fair play.

Later that same day we noticed something wrong with my son, the same day Taffy had run of the park we noticed something was wrong with my son. His thighs were swollen. As young parents we had never seen anything like it. Turns out it was fluid. Alex's liver was shutting down and fluid was building up in his body, the same day Taffy got out and ran downtown.

I remember realizing the Taffy had finally put me ahead in the Great Squirrel Wars. I had tried every kind of bird feeder in the world but nothing kept the S-Q-U-I-R-R-E-

L-S out of the sunflower see. Taffy become my 90 pound guided missile which I could launch through the back door at those bushy-tailed devils. Then I remember the day years later when Taffy could no longer launch and slept through our alarms,

But he had bought me time, and in that the Squirrel War was won.

The solemn and the silly, the highs and lows of our lives are sometimes marked by our animals.

I remember some low points I don't think I'll ever talk about except to my confessor and spiritual director when things in my house were pretty sketchy. We Lawlers are all human and none more frail than the father of the family. But no matter what kind of injustice was being foisted on my long suffering wife or mostly innocent children, no matter how high I raised my voice, or low I allowed my language and temper to sink. . . Taffy had to be walked.

And you know what that meant. I had to stop whatever I was doing and go outside and walk down the street or around Bass Lake which meant the universe , the stars, the moon, the water and trees all had time to work on me, which meant, of course, repentance.

They are so important.

Then there is the weird thing about us, maybe us men especially. We don't cry when we should, when our fathers die, or we loose our job, or whatever disaster strikes. I think we take those tears and place them in a secret room inside of us that says, keep these tears here until Taffy dies, or Toby, or Tony. Then we let go and grieve for your father and your grandparents, and the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

So last Monday Megan called me and I could tell something was wrong right away, of course, because she's a woman and she was crying. . . appropriately. . . how do you do that ladies?! "Taffy died" Megan said.

As I was walking from my car to the front door past the piles of poop, past the wire fence we put up to keep him from peeing on the front lawn, past the front porch where he spent 14 years barking at innocent walkers, many expecting a little road of Main Street in Blowing Rock to be a peaceful place, as I walked up to the house I had a feeling, it's a feeling we get when something big happens, something out of the ordinary, and it's a strange mixture of awe, solemnity, gratitude, and fear, all these mix together and you realize nothing will ever be the same again. Things have changed forever.

Your world has changed, it is not what it was and you do not know what it is going to become.
But you are ready.
You're ready to face whatever it is.
You know somehow, everything will be okay.
You have faith in the way things are and whatever they are going to become.

Our pets help us practice this Holy Moment.
They help us prepare for the really big changes,
the things that really change our lives,
the death of our spouse or child,
our own death,
some great and terrible calamity or war or plague.

I think one of the reasons we still love the Apocalypse of John even though it has, at times, been almost ruined by peddlers of fear and certainty, is because, in the end John is talking about a final moment of awe when everything will be changed forever, for good,
when all sin and injustice will be destroyed by forgiveness,
when all alienation will be swallowed by love,
when all creation will be saved by God,
the final Holy, Eternal, Moment of awe, solemnity, gratitude, and fear.

At the end of the visions I, John, heard these words;

“See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.

“It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.”

And let everyone who hears say, “Come.”

And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

The one who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!¹

When Jesus lived in the flesh he was bound by his flesh.

¹*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Re 22:12-14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

He could only really know his own joys and sorrows, he could only inhabit his own body.

When Jesus ascended to the Father and far above all heavens it was so he could descend in the power of the Holy Spirit and fill all things.

Now by the power of Spirit he inhabits all creation, every human longing,
every creature's joy,
every circumstance of our suffering,
he is with us even unto the end of the ages.

Come Lord Jesus, into every corner, every nook and cranny of human existence,
come be with every creature you've made,
come dry our tears,
come make us laugh,
come heal our hearts,
come make us whole.