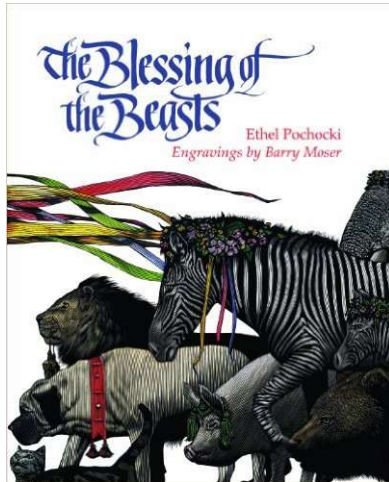


Sunday Storytellers



The Blessing of the Beasts

By Ethel Pochocki, Engravings by Barry Moser

Summary: As the church Celebration of Creatures service approaches, Francesca the cockroach yearns to be there, but Martin the skunk warns her against it:

“I don’t think that we are meant to be included, Francesca. It’s for the respectables, the cute and cuddlies. We are outcasts, my dear. They’ll never let us in. Can’t you just hear the humans shrieking as we walk down the aisle? They’d be fainting left and right.”

Francesca and Martin find a creative way into the church and learn that all of creation has value, purpose, and God’s blessing.

Sunday Morning:

Welcome & Introductions ‘Round the Room – Do we all know each other’s names?!

Read the Book

Today we are celebrating St. Francis Sunday with a blessing of the animals right after church [adapt to your own church tradition]. Did anyone bring their animal to be blessed after the service? This is a tradition in our church where we remember a holy man named Francis who died on October 3, 1226 – nearly 800 years ago! St. Francis had a special relationship and love of animals...

So here’s a story of the blessing of the animals at a church. [Read the book “librarian style” with pictures out toward the children as you read. Before turning the page make sure every child has seen the pictures.]

Wondering Questions

- I wonder what part of the story you like best?
- I wonder what part of the story is the most important part?
- The friar calls Martin and Francesca, ‘Brother Skunk’ and ‘Sister Cockroach’ and tells them that even though they are ‘the least of God’s littles ones’ they will sit at the head of the table. What do you think he means by this?

Hands-On Bible

Martin and Francesca are the lowest of the animals – the most despised. Jesus also sought out people who were considered low and undesirable: tax collectors, criminals, poor people, the sick. He confused the disciples, his followers, because he always embraced the lowest people of society rather than those who were the most important...



[Hand out the Bibles.]

Let's see what Jesus has to say about who is the most important:

Matthew 20:16 [Write this on a flip-chart pad or whiteboard.]

- Where do we start? [Table of Contents]
- The Bible is divided into two big sections, do you know what those are? [Old Testament/New Testament] The Old Testament is the old stories - before Jesus' life. The New Testament is the story of Jesus' life and teachings.
- We're looking for a passage in the New Testament, in the Book of Matthew. Can you find that listed in the Table of Contents? What page does Matthew start on?
- Go to that page and find Chapter 20 – see the big numbers at the top of the page?
- Now that we're all at Matthew 20, look at the tiny numbers in the text to tell you the verse. We want verse 16.
- When everyone has found the scripture, ask for a volunteer to read it aloud:

¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

Usually in our world, the most important people go first but in Jesus' view it's just the opposite: the most important people will be the last to be close to God. Jesus also thought that the most despised of us – like the cockroaches and the skunks – would be closest to God...

- Why did Jesus want the last –like the cockroaches and skunks – to be first?
- Why will the first – the most important -- be last? Does this seem fair to you?

Craft

You'll need:

- National Geographic magazines and/or old calendars featuring animals
- Scissors
- Modge Podge or glue
- Foam paint brushes
- Cardboard rectangles (approx. 5 x 7")

Use the quote from “All Things Bright and Beautiful,” the hymn based on a poem written by (Mrs.) Cecil Frances Alexander and published in 1848 (below). Print it out on card stock.

Have the children glue the poem in the center of the cardboard and then cut out and glue animals, people, and insects (!) from the magazines and old calendars to create a collaged frame around the text.

Snack

Animal crackers.



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All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
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