

Ask the Animals

We had a beautiful golden haired dog named “Angel.” She had arrived on our daughter’s back step quite suddenly and mysteriously on the first Sunday of Advent. Having just shared the story of the Annunciation with children at church that morning – our daughter knew this unexpected visitor had declared her own name. After determining that this was apparently a lost creature and not being able to locate its owner – our daughter sought to find a good home on the 90 acre “glebe land” on which we were living up on the Eastern Shore of Maryland at that time.

Angel was about three months old and might have been separated from her mother at an even younger age. She had few manners and for some reason had not learned to bark. My attempts, on all fours, to mimic a canine species with audible barking sounds were fruitless to teach her the ways of her kind. I wasn’t sure she knew she was a dog.

However the evening I sat a succulent hambone with many goodies attached, to cool on our screened in back porch table, I learned otherwise. This was intended to be people food – as I cherish the wonderful stock in a pot of navy beans that takes on many evolutions during its trips back and forth from the freezer during the winter months. This was not just any old hambone but the center piece of back burner cooking for a season. When I stepped out on the porch later that evening to discover the vanished bone and empty bowl – I was dumbstruck. And then when I saw the dog-sized opening in the back screen door – I knew immediately who the culprit was.

At this point I slid into my worst shadow side and with a whoop and a holler our Angel dutifully appeared perhaps thinking, “How nice of us to have set such a treat before her.” It didn’t take long, however, for her to realize that she had stolen my prize. And by the time I had hailed forth with my “mean momma” stuff: “How dare you do such a thing...you should have known better...that was my best hambone ever... you naughty dog.....” she schlunked away with her tail between her legs.

And I stomped into the living room and sat down with a thud – more mad at myself than anything. Harry gave me a sly look and said, “Don’t you think you were a little rough on her?” (He could hear me all the way through the house.)

“Well,” I huffed, ”that makes me so mad”..... and began to spu forth. He listened with his best priestly ear and then calmly said, ”Don’t you think you owe her and apology.”

“An apology..... to a dog?!” I blurted, some what self righteously.....but slowly began to feel a slight tinge of guilt. Almost on clue there was a gentle familiar scratch at the front kitchen door. As I opened the door there she stood, laying at my feet a well chewed hambone covered with fresh dirt from its treasured hiding place. Angel lifted her head and the look in her eyes said more clearly than any words could speak. “I’m so sorry, would you please forgive me?”

There has probably never been a time in my life that I felt so great a sense of humility. On my knees I found myself hugging her and almost wanting to worship her as I asked for her forgiveness. Surely these four legged creatures have had their language withheld in order that that may be for us the ones who really know how to listen to their creator.

What a lesson in forgiveness, reconciliation and peace.

I couldn't help but wonder – “Just who is this mysterious visitor who has come to my house to dwell?” And then again I thought, maybe she is just being her fullest dog self as a true Golden Retriever and doing what they do best.

Help me, Lord of all creation, to be my fullest true self, glorifying you in doing best what I was meant to do. Keep me humble in the presence of your face shining through all of your created order. Make me mindful of your peace, longing patiently to be realized between and among all of your creatures. Amen

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