

“Pet Names”

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Genesis 1:20-25; 2:19**

Do any of you have “pet names”? You know, a special nickname, a name of affection given by that special someone; your wife, husband, girlfriend, boyfriend.

Being the romantic I am I called Shawn yesterday and asked her if I had a “pet name” for her.

She said, “...no, I can’t think of any.” I accepted that. But later I recalled that over the 40 plus years of loving Shawn, I have said repeatedly to her, “Dear”, actually “Yes dear.” She does have a pet name for me, but I will not share it. Nuance is everything, as is misinterpretation.

If indeed you have a pet name (not too embarrassing) – tell me later. I’m always open to gaining knowledge.

We humans have been in the naming business for quite a long time. From the earliest era of developing language – we felt, recognized the need to “name”, to particularize all that was around us.

We name everything! It’s just the way we are. We were created this way. And we take special pleasure in naming what we love; what we cherish!

The names Robert, Heather and Victoria (our children) involved much discussion and excitement for Shawn and myself. I confess “Robert” was my idea. But Heather and Victoria originated with Shawn, and I love those names. As I recall, my pet name for Shawn was then developing, “Yes Dear.” (But that’s another story.)

I am sure most of you have done some naming – especially of the sort where love was involved.

So how about real pet names?

You know the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2. At one point God tells the man to start naming. Implied is that the human(s) do indeed have a superiority to this creation. After all Adam was created in the image of God, as was Eve.

Within this ancient story of beginnings, intertwined with finding the right creation for Adam – God presents to him all the creatures to name them. On a certain level this naming reflects an intimacy with all creation. Of course, there is much more involved in the intricacies of culture and society – but there is a truth, a recognition of a connectedness, among all creation. Even the early Kosher laws of developing Judaism – speak to, and reflect a common respect and reverence for all God’s creatures.

So, it is automatic to name our Pets. As children of God, we are in the naming business. Many of us want to impart, if not impute to our pet just the right name. A name that elicits love, affection; perhaps strength, or joyousness.

Augie was named by my daughter Heather – thinking about Shawn being in Seminary at the time – and naming this puppy after the great fourth century theologian of the church – Augustine.

But I can assure you he is not that bright – but I love him anyhow. (Don't tell Shawn I said that.) Rooney was named by my son after a famous soccer player. This is very high praise!

Here are the top cool dog names:

Joe Cool – Snoopy's name when acting cool.

James Dean

Spike

Versace – Fashionable!

Han Solo – Cool guy from Star Wars.

Zoro – cutting edge!

In my never ending pursuit for background material for my sermons, I recently read a fascinating and challenging paper that relates to our love of pets.

Dr. Tony Luizzo – a good friend and professor of Business and Economics at Wilkes University, also Director of the MBA Program, and an attorney – along with Professor Hao – have moved jurisprudence forward in the consideration of our pets.

The title of the paper is: “Measuring the Value of Petness: Economic and Legal Perspectives” It is again an interesting read, but to be read slowly - for non-lawyer types.

The paper shares; These pets that we have named, and invested ourselves in – indeed have value! Value beyond the purely economic utility of “what was the price of that animal?”

The courts (although some are slowly adjusting) have historically not allowed for damages due to someone causing the death of a pet, except for the economic function. The issue of affection (non-economic) component has been ignored.

Now, I am not intending to adjudicate this lively consideration, but Tony's (Dr. Liuzzo's) description, analysis and concluding suggestion – address the primacy of importance – so many of us place on and in our pets.

Augie is not a ceramic figurine. Rooney is not a bicycle. Your pet is not a Malibu or BMW. They exceed purely economic function. Wherever the courts may go – the recognition of non-economic – affection – is evident in the laughter and tears of every pet lover.

The paper concludes, “As the value of companionship is becoming more and more important in a model society, we advocate that the affection with pets should be recognized in court cases.”

This thinking is in good stead with our Judeo/Christian tradition.

We read in Genesis that God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let the birds fly above the earth... So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves...and God saw that it was good.” God also gets busy on the earth, creating cattle and creeping things and beasts. Again we humans are to name all the animals and to be responsible for them. From theology to biology there is a definite kinship with all God’s creatures. And some of them have become our pets, adding immensely to our lives, and to theirs.

Judaism has always held God’s creatures, animals, in high regard. We Christians have inherited this requirement for an appreciation of animals.

Jesus was certainly aware of the animals God had created. In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus mentions creatures on 27 separate occasions; Locusts, birds, dogs, pigs, sheep, foxes, snakes, doves, sparrows, fish, camels donkeys, colts, hens, chicks, ...(you get the picture). I’m sure some of them were pets and had great names!

Did you know, studies are showing that watching, petting, talking with an animal can lower blood pressure, and heart rate, and it didn’t matter if pets had four legs, wings, or scales, all pet owners benefited.

Pets help keep us young. Pets decrease loneliness, and give us the opportunity to be needed.

Recent studies are considering that the elderly benefit greatly when having pets. Both responsibility for the pet, and the pets love and unconditional approval enhance their lives.

Did you know that pets can help reduce the amount of time you spend in the doctor’s office? A study discovered that people with pets visited the doctor 16% less than those without pets. Perhaps this is due to pets helping to improve morale and handling stress better. Added value!

Story after story after story can be related, of how much a pet has brought joy, healing, comfort and love to so many of God’s children. For billions of us, God’s gift of pets – brings us a certain fulfillment that only they can share.

And you know – we are in good company in naming what we love. The God of all creation, who gave us the intelligence, and faculty to reason and love; according to our scriptures in Revelation – God will give you a “new name” reflecting His love and affection.

I wonder what “Pet name” God has given to me? (Don’t answer that!)

Amen.