



Blessing of the Animals

Rachel Mackintosh © 4 October 2026

The problem and solution of blessing

Today is St Francis of Assisi Day. Even those of us without much of a background in saints may know that St Francis is the patron saint of animals.

In honour of St Francis, this service is for the blessing of animals. But do we, Auckland Unitarians, find the notion of blessing problematic?

Maybe. Blessing may seem wrapped up in creed and dogma, and in a belief in an interventionist god.

We worship because we wish to understand how to value life and how to improve it for ourselves and for others. Can blessing fit into such worship?

What is blessing?

Blessing doesn't have to be something that only an ordained person can confer, and doesn't have to be something that connects us to an interventionist god we mostly don't believe in.

I found a definition of blessing, and I paraphrase here:

Blessing means making things better, improving your life and improving what you can offer, and does not mean divine intervention. When we bless others we add value to others, we give them strength, we promise commitment to them, we solidify our relationships, and we increase our potential to support others in the world. By being of greater service to others, we are able to bless their lives and our lives with the riches of the community — connection, belonging, healing and purpose. We are blessed to be a blessing.

Those are the thoughts of Dr Elmer Towns, an evangelical Christian with whom Unitarians would appear to have little in common. Just goes to show that we can find connection in the unlikeliest of places. A reminder of the value of being open to build a beloved community.

And while we are looking in unlikely places for wisdom that may speak to us, let's hear some thoughts from the person whose saint's day is today.

Saint Francis asked this of his God. We may ask the same of ourselves:

*“... grant that
I may not so much seek
To be consoled, as to console;
Not so much to be understood as
To understand; not so much to be
Loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;*

Thus, I propose that we don't throw the baby of blessing out with the bathwater of creed. I propose that, with Saint Francis, we seek this morning not so much to be loved by animals, as to love them. Not so much to be understood as

to understand. And then let us do the same for all the universe.

Come, let us worship — and bless — together.

Blessing of the Animals

Those who have brought an animal introduce the animal and say one word the animal makes them think of.

Followed by an Aotearoa adaptation of “Blessing of the Animals—St. Francis Day” by Thomas Rhodes

Meditation / Conversation starter

- What emotion stirs in you when you contemplate evolution?
- When you contemplate a poem or song about animals?