

I've never owned a pet. When I was a kid, we had an occasional parakeet and a procession of goldfish. When I was in high school one of my brothers bought a Doberman pinscher, mainly to scare the living daylights out of people. But I have never been responsible enough to own a pet. I have a hard enough time taking care of plants.

Still, I realize that many people really love their pets. Many farmers really love their animals. If a pet becomes ill or dies, it is like losing a member of the family. Animals all have character and personality, and they interact with their owners in almost magical ways.

Even God loved animals enough to load them on the ark with Noah and preserve them from the flood. When the waters receded, we find out just how much God loved animals. God included them in the first covenant.

There were several covenants in the Old Testament. The most famous were those God made with Abraham and later with Moses. But even before those, God said to Noah, "I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood." God said, "I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you." God did not expect anything else from Noah. God simply decided never again to flood the earth. Nobody had to do anything better. It was just a gift.

If God thought that much of animals, we should think highly of animals too. And if God thought that much of people, we should think highly of people too. Earlier in the Book of Genesis, God set up human beings to govern the world. God punished the wicked, but preserved the race.

This Lent, our scriptures will remind us again and again of the covenant between God and humanity. That covenant reaches its climax on the cross, where Jesus, the only Son of God, sacrificed everything in order to save us. It's a crazy covenant. It's one made out of love. There is nothing we can do to respond to it or to deserve it.

**In our relationships with other people, we often have a hard time with those who have hurt us, those who are too needy, those who misbehave, those who are too strict with us, or those who slam doors. It is hard to love people all the time, but it is God's command that we love people, even more than we love animals. No matter how awful the enemy, no matter how demanding the request, God has demonstrated to us by this covenant the proper way to hold ourselves: ready to give for someone else, without expecting something back.**