

All Souls

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places-John 14:2

Do animals go to Heaven?

- 🐾 People who have never been to Heaven sometimes say that animals don't go there. What would they know? Lots of pictures of Heaven from the Bible have animals in!
- 🐾 The book of Isaiah describes the coming kingdom of God, with animals living peaceful and contented lives, wolves and lambs lying down together (Isaiah 65:25). In God's perfect world, neither humans nor animals will need or want to hurt each other.
- 🐾 The book of Revelation talks about a New Heaven and New Earth; *everything* which God created is made new and happy. And St Paul agreed, he wrote that God was redeeming *all* Creation (Romans 8:19-22).
- 🐾 The Gospel according to John tells us that God loved the whole world so much, that he sent his Son to redeem all of it (John 3:16). Human beings aren't the only beings in the world!
- 🐾 And added to all of this, we know that our God is loving and just. Can we really imagine that God would create animals with the ability to think and feel, and then not care what happened to them? Some animals have sad and short lives on Earth, would a loving God really let that be the end of their story? And would we really want the creatures we know and love to be shut out of Heaven? If our compassion extends that far, surely God's love and compassion is even greater (remember Luke 11:11-13).



Prayer Pumpkin Lanterns

Equipment: Pumpkin (swede or other suitable vegetable); marker pen, sharp knife, spoon, tea-light, matches, paper and pens.

Activity: Carve an animal face onto the pumpkin and make a lantern. Obviously the degree of participation which is possible when it comes to the actual carving will depend very much on the age of the children/young people involved. However even if using the knife isn't possible, scooping out the pumpkin flesh and seeds may be (although pumpkins can be surprisingly tough!). Drawing a bit of the face on the pumpkin for an adult to carve out is another possibility. In some cases just bringing in a ready-carved lantern will save everyone trauma.

Whatever works best, when the pumpkin is finished, talk about animals having a place in God's Heavenly Kingdom. Also discuss how sad people feel when an animal which they know and love dies. Encourage participants to write or draw prayers either for animals or people who have lots animals, and place these around the pumpkin. If appropriate, it might even be helpful to lay photographs of lost pets. Adults may well want to join in with all this. Lots of people grieve for the loss of a companion animal, but are afraid to ask for prayer and support for fear (or worse, sadly, experience) of being dismissed casually or laughed at.



Prayer

Risen Jesus, you came to open the gates of Heaven to the whole world, human and animal. Help us to remember that your Father's love and power is stronger than death. But saying goodbye for a time is hard, so help us to remember too that it's alright to be sad sometimes. We place into your hands the animals we have loved and lost, thanking you for their lives and the happy times we've had with them. And we pray for everyone who has lost an animal friend, and who is missing their love and company. **Amen.**

Health Warning and Encouragement

N.B. It is normal for very young children to have a hazy idea about death, and some difficulty grasping its permanence in physical, earthly terms. This is a very bad reason to avoid talking about it altogether. It is a reality from which they cannot be protected, and popular culture has plenty to say about it. Would we want children to form their understanding about human relationships from cartoons, films and pop music? Why should death be any different? Also even children who have never lost a loved one, human or animal, will do so at some point. It makes a painful situation even more distressing if they have never talked about it properly beforehand with trusted adults, and have only the scary and confusing ideas which they've picked up elsewhere.

But talking about death does need to be done sensitively, especially in the context of Heaven and resurrection. Questions like 'Why can't a get a bus to Heaven to see granddad?'; 'When is he coming back?' and 'Where is my guinea-pig now?' are all possible. This topic is not an easy one to handle, but it is really important.

