

JOHN 14:15-21, ACTS 2:41-47

Every once in a while we need a fun sermon. I am the one who needs one today. Last Sunday I had the privilege and pleasure of baptizing my granddaughter. It was a good Sunday. This weekend, however, they moved to New Hampshire. So Pam and I are having grandbaby withdrawal. So I need a fun sermon and today's sermon is a fun sermon on a serious topic, loosely connected to the scripture lesson.

I like dogs but not all dogs like me. I use that saying to explain why some dogs want to nip at my legs rather than have me rub their ears. I never was afraid of dogs until I became a minister. Then I had two close calls while visiting shut-ins. One was with a German shepherd who let me into the house to visit but didn't want me to leave. I got out the door with him close on my heels wanting a piece of my leg. The other time it was a Border Collie who was in the barn but saw me get out of the car to walk to the house. He started from the barn as I started to the house. Luckily the daughter of the shut-in stopped the dog before he stopped me. Those were a couple of the dogs that didn't like me.

We have had 4 dogs. Unfortunately none of them worked out as pets especially the one we nicknamed Kojo. But those are different stories for a different time. I now get my dog contact vicariously through k-9's of some of our members. I especially get along with one well because we share a philosophy of life, enjoy the little things, playing catch with a ball, digging a hole in the yard, and walking in the rain.

Today you, find dogs everywhere not just being pets but doing some amazing work. They work like a dog. Last year there was an article in Time Magazine about a dog named Koyla. It seems there was a patient at UCLA Medical Center who was there for quadruple-bypass surgery. The article called her Hazel. After surgery she was in the ICU and had barely moved or opened eyes. This went on for days and the situation was getting desperate. Everyone was getting concerned so they called in a member of canine candy-stripping corps, Koyla. Koyla is a 145 pound, shaggy white Great Pyrenees. She crawled right up on Hazel's hospital bed and snuggled beside her. She just laid beside Hazel, who hadn't twitched a muscle for days. All the nurses all gathered around to watch. They were tense and very concerned. Well, first there was movement in Hazel's right hand. It inched towards the dog, and started stroking her fur. Within minutes Hazel was smiling and talking, calling the huge dog her friend. Hazel's blood pressure even came down to normal levels. In the canine candy-stripping corps there are a poodle, a greyhound, a pug, 8 golden retrievers, 4 black labs, 2 German shepherds, several mutts and Koyla. An organization called Therapy Dogs International screens dogs for personality, obedience and training. They have provided certification for more than 4,500 pet partners. They give service to 350,000 patients in the USA. These dogs demonstrate loyalty and obedience and offer comfort and a sense of well-being to the people they serve.

When we think of attributes we are to have as Christians the same ones to mind. We are to be loyal and obedient to our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ. In the gospel lesson it says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments". Oswald Chambers "It is only by obedience that we understand the teaching of God."

There is a story of a black gentleman who was a turpentine worker. His faithful dog just died in a fire because would not desert his master's dinner pail which he had been told to watch. The man said "I always had to be careful what I told him to do, because I knew he would do it." Jesus said, "If

you love me you will keep my commandments.” We need to be obedient to Jesus Christ. We are to offer comfort and a sense of well being to those around us. God offers us comfort through the Holy Spirit. Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit as our comforter. So we know we are to pass it along and to offer comfort to other. I will mention this again in a minute.

Now we will have some fun because there are some other qualities of many dogs that we would do well to imitate. First greet loved ones with wagging tails. Nothing is as important as feeling loved. Most dogs do a good job of making others feel loved. If they greet you with a wagging tail they are saying, this is home, this where you belong, this is where you’re safe, this is where you are loved.

A second quality of dogs we need to imitate is be loyal. Loyalty is a good thing and one things dogs do well is being loyal. Those that wanted to bite my leg were basically being loyal and protective. Winnie the Pooh once said “If you live to be a hundred, I want to live to be a hundred minus one day so I never have to live with out you”. We see that quality reflected in dogs when they are loyal to their master. Loyalty is important in discipleship: loyalty to god, our spouses our families, our community and our friends.

Some other advice from our K-9 friends is to avoid biting when a simple growl will do. Sometimes we overreact and hurt another by what say or do. If we can growl before we bite we may find that growling is enough. We can be firm in our love without being destructive.

Only two more qualities it would be good for us to imitate. No matter how harshly you are scolded, don’t pout, run back and make friends. Every dog gets scolded once in a while but they don’t carry grudges. Usually they wait a few minutes then come bouncing back for an ear rub. We need to make friends and keep them by overlooking their faults, not keeping a score card of rights and wrongs, by not taking offence and not carrying a grudge.

Finally if someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by and nuzzle gently. We all have bad days and dogs seem to have an instinct that tells them when to be jumping around and when to just be there beside you. Words are not always needed, or even helpful, to convey friendship and concern. Sometimes we need to just be silent, sit close by and nuzzle gently.

We should not think of ourselves as dogs and God as our master in that sense, but dogs can remind us of important truths about obedience, loyalty, and compassion. Sometimes dogs display these good character traits even better than we can. They can be more humble, more loving, more grateful, more joyful, and more kindhearted. We all need to make a vow “I will never let my dog be a better Christian than I am.”