

## A Sermon on Compassion

Sermon by Minister Angela Smith of COPE for March 1st, 2020 (and beyond)

Years ago I had a cat named Sophie who was pregnant and gave birth to kittens. There were four kittens total. One of the kittens was deformed with a misshapen head and elongated neck and scrunched up face and ears (these were tabby cats). Sophie rejected that one. I named the deformed one Calliope and I took care of her because Sophie rejected her. I believe Calliope imprinted on me as a result of the rejection by Sophie and my attention and kindness towards her. And, if not near me for any reason if I called her she would run into the room I was in with kind of a Hunchback of Notre Dame type movement in running at times and climb furniture to reach me. It was very sweet and also quite sad. I think I was the only compassion or kindness she knew. The other people said because of her deformity and disability as well as being rejected by her mother that meant she would likely die. I understood that too. I just hoped she wouldn't because I loved her anyway. But, not everyone feels that way about the different and it does require a level of compassion and patience many seem to lack even when dealing with far less obvious challenges. Calliope did die before she reached 4 months old. I'm crying about that as I write this sermon and that was about 15 years ago now.

My point with this is that those of us who are able to care for the Calliopes of the world, do our best with very limited resources and support. And, we do it because we see the innocence and joy of which the Calliopes are capable. But, it would seem nature overall including sometimes birth mothers just reject their offspring and a consensus about just letting such individuals die as they'd be killed in a totally feral environment surfaces where examples in nature exist such as wild horses killing disabled foals even when the mother protests of the same herd. So, there is debate and protest among the animals too and the controversy isn't limited to humankind so the matter is not yet settled though the majority seem okay with the death as inevitable, some wish to expedite it, and some wish to save the innocent or at least make sure they are comfortable and have some joyful moments even if short-lived. Death is inevitable for all carbon-based life forms including humans. And, there is no reason to expedite when enough people are willing to show compassion and acceptance while fully integrating all the different who pose no threat to society and simply were born that way. Calliope remains in my heart and helps me keep my heart soft when I find my patience wear thin in responding to cries for help.

As long as it is a controversy, I'd like very much if we could all discuss it as calmly as possible or accept it is going to be a heated debated because even in the nonhuman realms there is discussion. Ants perform triage and try to heal their wounded and always carry them back home in some colonies. Baboons have been known to wait to avenge another member of their troop who was run down by a vehicle and then stone the vehicle when it drives by again. Horses will kill disabled foals that are unable to stand on their own in a timely fashion. And, cats reject their deformed babies at times. So, we've got a lot of arguments going on how to handle this from many species including our own. We seem to be voicing in our own human languages a controversy that crosses a lot of boundaries. But, individually, I'm happy for my time with Calliope and would do it all over again in caring for her. It was a pleasure and I still think Sophie's a bitch. But, also recognize in

nature with a natural predator as your mother you might expect to be rejected if you look more like dinner than a fellow hunter in training. And, I know for Calliope, I was the conduit of grace that showed her love when no one else would and that's still bittersweet. If you have a glass of wine after reading this, consider that something other than drinking Jesus' blood please. I believe Jesus thinks that's gross and likely insulting unless you are calling Jesus a drunk and say he drank so much wine his blood is alcoholic in content. Even so, are you a vampire? That's gross. He turned water into wine, not his blood. You want some water after service rather than wine? Go ahead. But, don't call that blood either. It's water. Wine is wine. Blood is not for drinking. Some people take things very literally and some people are quite artful and require understanding nuance. But, if you do have a glass of wine after this one, please, if with another, say something nice about Calliope or send her a prayer that should she return through rapture, revelation, or reincarnation, that she is surrounded by the love she deserves.

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