

August 6 – Live Life with Anticipation

Romans 8:18-25

The first sermon I ever heard on cats is based on the scripture found in Romans 8:19 “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.” An early modern translator, J.B. Phillips translates it: “The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.” The Message says, “The created world itself can hardly wait for what’s coming next.” The words “eager longing” or “on tiptoe” or “hardly wait” are a translation of the Greek work *Apokaradokia*.

Think about a cat when it is really excited, like just before being fed. They will weave in and out around your feet. They are standing on tiptoes in anticipation, usually meowing loudly. Their whole body is a quiver awaiting the meal that is to come. That is *Apokaradokia*. Ever since hearing a sermon on that word I have wanted to use it to name a cat but so far my suggestion has been vetoed by Jenny when new feline friends enter our family.

There are many things cats can teach us. Just like their four legged dog friends, they remind us of the love and presence of God. Many of you, in sharing your stories about your favorite felines, tell of how much they give love. Beyond this wonderful attribute they have other things to teach us. Over the next four weeks we will be challenged to live more faithfully and to relate to each other more compassionately as we explore the lessons our cat friends can teach us if we are willing to listen.

It is interesting to note that, at least in the world of social media, cats do not have a great reputation. Their pictures show up most of all to highlight grumpiness, naughtiness, craziness and worse, while their dog companions are shown mostly as images of love and loyalty. Now I realize there are cat people and dog people. Each are fiercely loyal and willing to take umbrage at the slightest mention of a character flaw of their favored pet. Few had any problems imagining a sermon series on dogs, but cats? I had numerous people ask, “What could you possibly preach about concerning them?” So, they have a perception problem to those who do not love them fiercely. Having spent my life with dogs, my preference, and cats, the women in my life’s preference, I

have come to enjoy our feline gifts from God and realize that they too have much to teach us.

Today I want to begin with what cats teach us about the gift of anticipation. We will examine why this is a good and positive trait, as long as it is not carried too far. Each week I will share some of your pictures and stories. I am also going to share a cat image from literature that will highlight the particular trait we are examining that day.

When I thought about anticipation, Garfield immediately came to mind. Now Garfield could probably never get up on tiptoes as he has had one too many pans of lasagna for that. Garfield can be grumpy to the max, terrorizing Odie when he gets on his nerves and before he has his morning coffee. Sometimes Garfield is not a cat you want to be around. But one thing about Garfield is that he spends much of his life filled with anticipation. For Garfield food is his god. He thinks about lasagna, pizza, donuts and coffee. He dreams about them. Much of his life is focused on this one thing. With eager longing he awaits the next meal or treat.

Paul talks about how “all of creation is on tiptoe to see wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.” The Message puts it this way: “The created world itself can hardly wait for what’s coming next.” So my question is this: What would it look like to live our lives with this kind of excited anticipation? Too often we look forward with dread, not with anticipation and hope. We need to be like Garfield, filled with anticipation, but I hope about something more important than food! We need to be filled with anticipation for what God can and will be doing in our lives and the lives of others.

Even if we are striving to live with anticipation, eagerly awaiting what God will do next, we also need to celebrate the fact that life right now is good. Living with anticipation is not an escapist point of view where the longing is for relief from the struggles of today. No, it begins with the fact that life right now is good, but with the hope that tomorrow can be even better. One of the reasons Garfield can spend all of his time daydreaming about the next pan of lasagna is that all of his present needs are taken care of. He can sleep in the sunlight knowing John will attend to his needs. He

isn't worried about if he will eat. He expects it will happen even if he is a bit too demanding about how his needs should be met.

Do we celebrate that life, right this moment, is good? Enjoying the moment is something we sometimes forget to do when we start anticipating something better tomorrow. We can learn a lot from cats in this regard. I think about our current feline king. When the sun comes through the window in the winter he stretches out to his full length basking in the heat. Or there is Pam Bennett's cat. Here enjoying a nap. Cats remind us to celebrate the wonderful moments of today.

Also, if we have a spirit of anticipation, we celebrate that while life is good, life can be even better. For a cat, this comes through a spirit of curiosity. Cats are known for their incredible curiosity. Shirley Anderson shared a picture of her former cat as a kitten exploring life. A curious life means we are not happy with the status quo. We believe there is always something more. The older we get, the harder it is to retain the spirit of curiosity. When we are three, the world is one big exciting place to be explored. Now, not so much if we don't strive for it. When we lose curiosity, we begin to dread the changes in life and we quit having a spirit of anticipation. How curious are you today? Do you have an openness for the new or do you just wish things would stay the same? Cultivating a spirit of curiosity is important.

All of this comes back to that word. *Apokaradokia*. Do you believe God is at work now in your life? Can you hardly wait to see what will happen next? As you know, the church has graciously granted us a study leave in October. Every day we talk about the trip to come. We have been planning for it, researching it, purchasing for it. We are totally focused on it. We can hardly wait and it is still months away. We are living a bit the spirit of *Apokaradokia*. I realize that I don't bring that same kind of enthusiasm to a lot of other areas of my life. So much of what happens is routine and been done so many times before. There is no wonder, no excitement, just resignation. Yet, God is at work in even the most routine of actions. This is why I need to be reminded by my cat that you never know what will happen.

The other day I noticed him on tiptoes, tail fluffed out and mewing softly. Something really exciting was taking place. He was in our back yard, a place he spends most of his life. What had happened to bring on this fevered excitement? A mouse! I realize he never walks into the back yard uninterested. He is always alert for he never knows when there will be a bug, a fly, or a mouse to find. He can hardly wait to go outside full of wonder as to what will happen. *Apokaradokia*, a spirit of anticipation is called for. A call to be curious, to celebrate and to anticipate. God is always doing something new.

Let me end by sharing a story of *Apokaradokia*. She came to Bible Study every week and we usually began with a bit of sharing about the week past. Alice, almost always, had some brief story to share about some wonderful thing God had done in her life. Alice, had come to faith later in life. She was continually and constantly amazed that God loved her, forgave her and was at work in her life. She was always eagerly anticipating another connection with God. She was rarely disappointed even if the things she mentioned were usually not spectacular events. She sold Avon and I remember her telling us one time about a long time client of hers who was in the hospital. Alice did not like going to the hospital but she felt a nudge to go visit this woman. They chatted a bit about life. The woman finally looked at Alice and said, "You go to church, don't you?" When Alice said yes, her friend said, "Would you pray for me? I am having surgery tomorrow and I am so scared." Praying in public was something Alice didn't do. She had never done it at our Bible Study. She was too self-conscious about her newness to faith. Yet, here was someone in need. Alice mustered the courage to say a brief prayer. In telling us about this, the look of amazement on her face was contagious. She said, "As I prayed this woman relaxed. You could see the tension leave her." The woman thanked her for coming and praying. Alice said, "To think God used me of all people!" Alice often prayed after that. That eager expectation that God is at work is what we are all called to have in faith.

May the spirit of *Apokaradokia* fill you and bless you now and always.