

For a dozen or so years of my life, my principal domestic companion (at least as far as she was concerned anyway) was a small, rather greedy and very vocal black cat called Chrissy. This was some time ago now. I have moved on, or even perhaps up, in the world since then: now that rôle is fulfilled by a small black dog, sorry a tall Taiwanese man.

Anyway, a typical feline female, Chrissy delighted in being fed, on demand. Any time of the day. Or night. Such was her love of eating that she could move from fast asleep on the sofa to by the bowl in the kitchen in somewhat less than a second, her paws, oftentimes never touching the carpet as she quite literally flew to the food. Luckily for all things small and feathery Chrissy was a flat cat, and, as cats cannot write so the secret of feline flight died with her. Defying gravity was not her only skill. She also loved having the door opened for her entrance if it was closed, or closed if it was open: just to make sure I didn't forget who was in charge. When she was in the mood she would also contentedly tolerate being stroked for hours, whiling the time away in a cloud of purrs, despite my being convinced (wrongly of course) that I had something far more important to do. Timing, of course, is everything and Chrissy's arrival on your lap was always timed to coincide with reaching for a cup of tea, a bursting full bladder, needing to change the TV channel (this was before the age of the remote): any reason in fact that one was just about to get up. Forget that reason: my purpose in life for the next 30 minutes or so was to pet my pet at least if I valued keeping a cat's claws away from my pretty youthful looks (as I said, this was a long time ago).

Should I, however, in a moment of weakness or sentimentality ever decide to pick Chrissy up without prior permission, another rather different side of the demanding but dependent creature emerged. What followed would be a maelstrom of twisting, squirming, nipping, biting, wriggling and bending into shapes a contortionist could only dream of. If it was one of those baleful occasions where a vet was involved and I couldn't let her go, the manful (or catful) struggle ended only when the realisation dawned on my companion that she could not escape and having exhausted the routes of violence and escapology the only practicable thing a cat could now do, however undignified, was to lapse into pitiful mews.

Well the ancient Egyptians may have worshipped cats, and the modern British may be getting close to the practice, but, despite its manifold oddities, this is not yet the habit of the Church of England, it has not yet published yet Common Worship Cat edition. So you may be wondering why a small, fat cat is featuring so heavily at the

start of this sermon. Nothing to do with the presence of broiled fish in our gospel reading tonight, but kitty's under consideration today because, I would suggest, there's something about the behaviour of that small creature, that mirrors the way we relate to God.

God pours his loving-kindnesses and blessing upon us which, like Whiskas-on-demand, we're of course more than happy to tolerate. Purr, purr. But this tolerance lasts only if God will stay where we want him to, so we know where to go to get his good things when we want them and- most importantly- where to avoid going when we don't want reminding of his presence. Unfortunately for this way of thinking, God of course, will never stay just there please, and has the somewhat alarming habit of 'picking us up' so to speak without our prior say so. And the thing is, no matter how long our claws, how loud our protests, how fervent our struggles, if we bite, nip, scratch and scream, lash out, thrash out , twist and turn and shout that Love will never let us go.

We are of course not cats: despite appearances to the contrary we are, if not quite as cool as those creatures, probably more intelligent. So, smart and devious as we are, we might think to shoo God away by becoming as repulsive as possible, trying out the equivalent of that trusted canine routine of rolling in fox poo then wandering onto the rug in front of the in-laws and ostentatiously licking your private parts. And yet, we're not that smart: not matter how far we spin down the debasing spiral, flaunting our cruelty and callousness, our selfishness and self-obsession, our indifference and inhumanity; no matter how desperate to drown out the sound of God's voice with pride and lust and gluttony, avarice and the rest: no matter how hard we try to push God away, that Love will never let us go.

It is a certainty that, our lives will have suffering, and pain, and struggle, and toil and labour and loss and tears: we will rarely land on our feet and seldom, if ever, get the cream. We may spend a lot of time feeling like bedraggled strays, feral and abandoned. But that's only because, stalking the mice, playing with the string: while our attention is on the fleeting distractions of this world, we fail to feel the squeeze.

God holds us so, so tight. And everyone who belong to Jesus will never be lost, he will never, but never, let go.