

15<sup>th</sup> January 2021

## Affection

**“He walked by himself, and all places were alike to him.”**

*Rudyard Kipling, Just So Stories, ‘The Cat that Walked by Himself’*

If the unpredictability of dogs was a trial of parish ministry, even more of a struggle was coping with the deviousness of cats. I should say that I have no aversion to cats as a species. But I do have an antipathy towards individual cats, especially the ones that skulk around unsuspecting visitors.

It’s been said that if you feed a dog, it thinks you’re a god. If you feed a cat, it *knows* it’s God. Cats rule! Any cat I’ve ever known – and this is not gender specific – not only “walked by himself” in Kipling’s terms, but *owned* everywhere he walked. “All places were alike to him” because all places were his – or her – kingdom, with supreme and unquestioned control. Have you even known a cat to respond to “Down, boy!”, or “Sit!”, or even “Walkies!” No? I thought not. “Cats rule!” is the absolute truth.

I visited a lady who had seven cats. I remember counting them so I knew where they all were, and what they were doing, and what they were *likely* to do next. “One, two, three, four, five, six ...” Damn! Where’s the ginger one? Then I would know *exactly* where it was when it jumped off the back of the sofa onto my shoulder. “Seven!” Seven too many for me ...

Why do people keep cats? Maybe they like unpredictability. But they tell me – and I believe them – that it’s about the affection cats offer. The cat that rubs itself round and round your legs when you come home because it’s so pleased to see you. The cat that purrs contentedly when it’s on your lap. The cat that’s the “de-stressor” when it lets you stroke it repeatedly. The cat that meows affectionately when you feed it. Affection! Yes, I get that, and cats are able to give that in abundance.

So, I can forgive the vagaries of feline behaviour because I know the value of the affection a cat can give. And I’m prepared to tolerate surprises because I know the difference this affection makes to many people. Kipling’s cat “walked by himself, and all places were alike to him.” And, in so doing, he taught people like me what a difference affection can make.

### A prayer for today

*St Paul said: “Set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth.”  
Lord, help me show this heavenly affection when and where it’s needed most. Amen*

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