

## *Martha Powell's Speech*

I'm going to quote from the book "Dominion" by Matthew Scully, who said this: "Animals are ... a test of our character, of mankind's capacity for empathy and for decent, honorable conduct and faithful stewardship."

And to paraphrase him further, we are called to treat them with kindness, not because they have rights or power, but because they don't.

People often fail this test of character. Some of them fail it badly.

The bond between man and animal has been examined in volumes of literature, from the most ancient texts to Clifford the Big Red Dog.

Good people find things in these books that touch their hearts; good people find things in animals that touch their hearts.

But there are bad people whose eyes are never opened to the wonder of an animal.

The Bible has a description for this. It's in Proverbs 12. It says, "A righteous man regards the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel."

While we can see what the Divine Order is in our relationship with animals, sometimes we still wonder why God allows mankind to perpetrate a crime like the one Mercy suffered.

After all, we know whose side *He* is on. Psalms 34 says, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

For me, the key is that God gave people self-determination and each person is given a choice of whether they will harbor good or evil in their heart.

The cruel murder of this beautiful soul reminds us that there is evil in this world.

That she was rescued by good Samaritans and brought to this place, where kind arms were waiting to show her love and willing to save her life, makes us know that there is goodness in this world.

Good and evil: which is stronger?

In this case, when good people looked into the eyes of a broken, tortured animal they named her Mercy, after what was in their hearts.

Goodness welled up in the hearts of thousands of people who learned of Mercy's story.

Prayers, offers to help and donations for Mercy's care rained down on this place.

For a brief moment, evil scored a hollow victory when all of man's best efforts were not enough to save Mercy's broken body, but when her valiant heart finally gave out, it had been emptied of fear and was surely filled with grace.

God's covenant with Mercy's soul was not dependent upon how mankind treated her, and because He promises that if we are absent from our earthly body, we are present with the Lord, we know that today Mercy is in Heaven with a Good Shepherd.

Mercy will never encounter evil again.

Back here on earth, and even in the face of these horrors, we've all been asked questions about why we spend our time and money and often our very life force rescuing animals when, the theory goes, there are so many things in the world that are more important.

They want to know why we waste time fighting evil against animals when we could be fighting man's evil against man?

In my own life, most of the people asking these questions have been related to me, usually intensely religious people... but forgetful.

They forget that God called Himself a shepherd over and over again; they forget that He always identified himself with animal caretakers, singling them out in Bethlehem's fields to hear the first news of the birth of Christ.

And they forget that *that birth*, which could have taken place anywhere on Earth, took place in a stable where among the first things the infant would have seen were faithful animals.

But aside from all that, it seems to me that the answer to why we do this is: this is a war. Enlightenment vs. ignorance, light vs. darkness, good vs. evil. And a war, whether it is physical or metaphysical or mental, is a series of battles, fought on multiple fronts.

This is simply the front we have chosen: to protect helpless animals when mankind's dominion over them becomes evil;

to treat them with kindness; to show decent, honorable conduct and faithful stewardship.

What people who question our fight on this front don't understand is this: because human beings who abuse animals always eventually get around to abusing their fellow

human beings, we are, it turns out, simply on the front line of the same war.

Sometimes we lose a battle, sometimes a valiant heart gives out, but we can never give up, we must stand our ground, we can advance, Mercy by Mercy, heart by heart, and we will not stop fighting evil.

We know this struggle is endless, but just look at this beautiful shelter, built from modest beginnings by the hearts and souls of good people who soldier on here day after day. We have to believe that there are more of us out there than there are of them.

Finally, what does God say of this war, what does He say about our fight for all the Mercies?

Here is a verse from Isaiah 58: “If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”

Go in peace, Mercy.