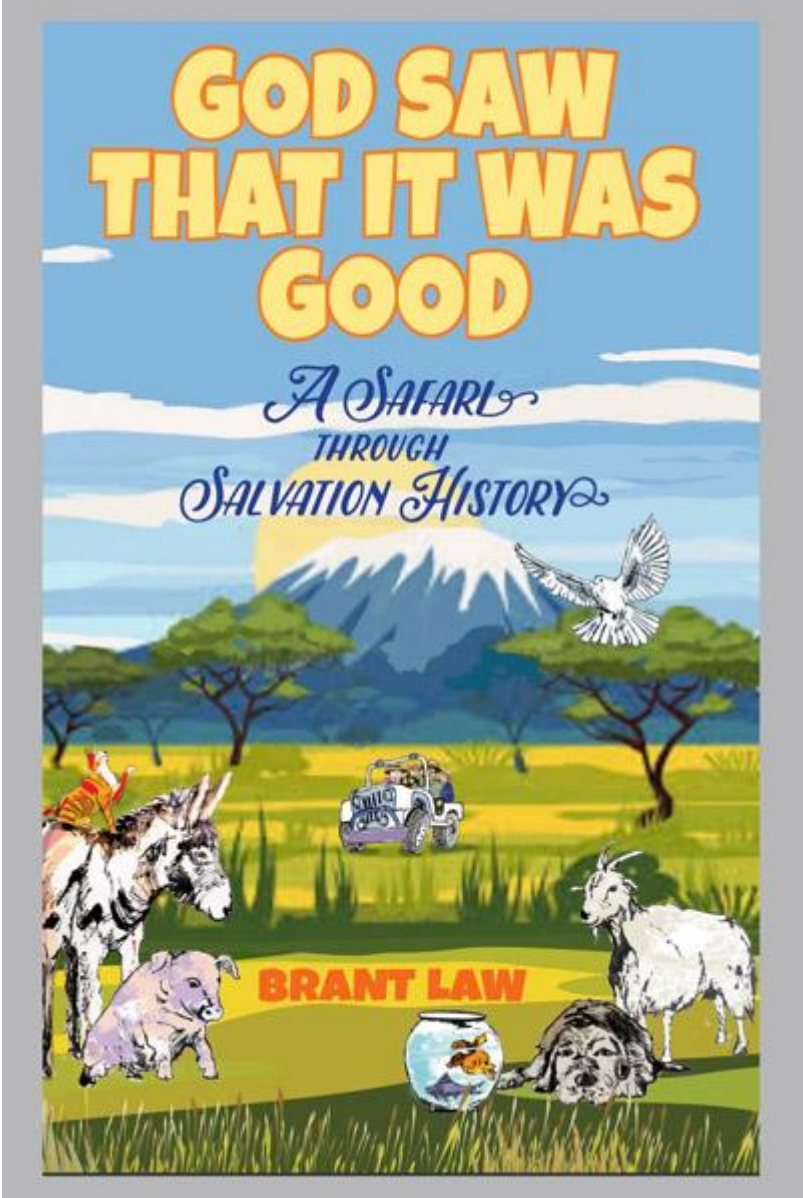


Menagerie in Bible can teach deeper lessons, author says

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |





First-time author Brant Law's book "God Saw That It Was Good: A Safari Through Salvation History" is a collection of personal, biblical and saint stories about animals. (Courtesy Brant Law)



Brant Law reads with his cats at his Alma home in the summer of 2020. Law's first book "God Saw That It Was Good: A Safari Through Salvation History" details stories of animals in the Bible, in the lives of saints and also in his personal life. (Courtesy Brant Law)

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From a donkey weeping tears at the death of St. Francis of Assisi, to birds praying the Liturgy of the Hours in "The Voyage of Saint Brendan," to biblical stories depicting horses as a sign of strength, God uses creation to speak to each of us.

This is the concept that Brant Law, a proud Catholic and "Cat-holic" from Alma, explores in his first book, "God Saw That It Was Good: A Safari Through Salvation History."

"I've always loved animals. I grew up on a rural farm, a cattle farm," in Franklin County, the 39-year-old said. "I didn't have a lot of people around. I had animals."

Combine that with his lifelong desire to write and his theology degree through the former Little Rock Theology Institute, and he had the groundwork for his collection of stories about how animals have influenced his own life, the lives of saints and in the Bible.

"I tried to keep it light. I tried to keep it educational. Kind of like planning a math lesson, making it for as many people as possible," Law said, adding the book is primarily for adults. "I hope they smile, laugh and hopefully grow closer to God. Because when I'm around animals, they make me smile and make me laugh."

Law, a math teacher at Alma High School who has calico cats named Ana, Bella and Pom Pom, moved to Crawford County from Fayetteville in 2016 with his wife Christy. They attend Sacred Heart of Mary Church in Barling, but Law said he became less active in parish ministry.

"I was sitting there in bed, praying to God, 'Am I going to do anything with writing and my theology degree?' Then it hit me; 'Hey, you like animals.' Sometimes in theology they teach you to look through the Bible" in a different way, he said. "I had that inspiration. Then the next day I opened up the Mass readings and they were about Noah's Ark."

The process took about two years, including a few months of writing and then editing with his publisher, Paraclete Press. It was released in early April.

With 144 pages and 13 chapters, the book walks through stories about animals from donkeys to cats. Law said his favorite story in the book is a personal one.

"My wife and I fell in love because of a mice infestation," he wrote, explaining he hadn't spoken much with his future wife, a cheer coach at Alma High School, until mice set up housekeeping in her office. He quickly offered her his cat, who would gladly take the job of eradicating them. Though maintenance took care of the issue, it opened the door for their eventual romance.

While she was not initially an animal lover like him, Christy soon grew to have a "limitless" love for their cat Bella, as Law wrote.

"She may have been exaggerating slightly, but what she said shows how animals can actually help us glimpse the divine. In this instance, because of a cat, my wife was able to gain a tangible understanding of what it means to love through the depths and heights of infinity — the love that only describes the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

In his chapter "My Best Friend," Law shares about the love of his childhood dog Brinkley, the way dogs are represented in the Bible — he notes a bit of a "gut-punch" for dog lovers, as

there are not many positive descriptions — and their loyal nature, shown in the life of St. Roch, the patron saint of dogs.

“Dogs know and obey their masters’ call and are not prone to anger unless something unjust is being done to them. In a very strange way, they are a model of faith for how to live a Christian life,” Law writes. “Like the dog, we need a faithful, loving, trusting, obedient, childlike relationship with God so we can hear our Father’s call and live the life he truly wants us to live.”

Law also tells of mythical creatures, including the legend of St. Columba who, with the sign of the cross, commanded the Loch Ness Monster to leave. Law encourages the reader not to “roll your eyes too much,” but goes on to explain, “When we are encountering fear and uncertainty in our lives, this story can be a reminder that the cross of Christ has banished all evil to the depths of darkness, echoing the words of Psalm 23:4 in our heart and soul: ‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.’”

Law said he hopes readers will take away a greater awareness of God.

“I hope that they just learn to see God more in creation and realize that all these wonderful and beautiful things around us are speaking to us, drawing us closer to him,” he said.

The book is available at paracletepress.com and amazon.com for \$16.99.