

Faith Comment published in the Petersfield Post

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Cats

I look after three cats – two elderly females who live in my house, and a feral cat who lives in my garden. Now, depending on whether you are a dog person or a cat person or an indifferent to pets person, I expect you are either horrified or sympathetic. People either love or hate cats – they tend not to be neutral about them. People who hate them will tell you all sorts of reasons why. Some are understandable – gardeners object to cats digging in their gardens, lying on their plants, using their newly dug vegetable plots as latrines. Others seem completely irrational. I met an American lady at an international study centre in Switzerland who objected that some of the students were encouraging a stray cat who wandered through the building by feeding it and stroking it. It had a cough, and she seemed to be overly keen for me to say that the cat was disease ridden and should be taken to the vet with a view to termination.

We don't all have the talent of instant likeability. Sometimes people's prejudices overwhelm them and they can only see what they expect rather than what is. Their view of what they see is not balanced. I have been told by some-one who is afraid of cats that one of my cats is staring at her, and plotting. Fear of the unknown, fear of what is different, can lead to terribly tragedy. Watching a recent film clip of a white policeman in the US shooting an African-American lad in his car because he reached for his ID, I was struck by how afraid the young policeman looked. Did his fear of the unknown cause him to make a fatal misjudgement? Hatred may be rooted in fear. Cats are enigmatic, unreadable, and strangely drawn to people who dislike them. Terrible treatment has been meted out to them down the centuries.