

## **The Cops aren't Pigs and We aren't Cattle**

*"Many children were brought here illegally by drug mules with calves the size of cantaloupes."* Representative Steven King, The State of New York

**We need a manger's pause: to learn what is animal and what is human in these moments of reinvigorated movements.**

**What is most new in New York City is that the police are not using the crowd corrals, the ones used to keep protesters off the street. We have felt like cattle and now we are back on the streets. The corrals are up to protect those who aren't in the streets. Thank you, Mayor deBlasio.**

**What is also new is the popcorn nature of the die-ins. They are happening all over the five boroughs, in the streets, on the bridges and lasting 11 minutes, the time Eric Garner was down or counting to 11, again memorializing those breathless moments. We lie like animals in a pasture. We lie down. Thank you, smart protesters, who cause just enough disruption to remark and not enough to get arrested.**

**Some people are calling the police animal names, just like they felt the police had degraded Eric Garner and William Brown. Tit for tat. Pig for gorilla. Cattle for cattle? There is a subtext in our current moment. Who is a pig? Who is a monster gorilla? Who are the cattle?**

**Note how the Christmas story turns the animals into heroes, almost humanizes them. The names we hurl at each other dehumanizes animals and humans, both.**

**The first step in being able to hurt someone else is to dehumanize them. Think of Newtown Connecticut on this week's second anniversary. The killer forgot those children were human. He turned them into an illusion and a delusion. To kill somebody, first you have to dehumanize them or turn them into a class B citizen or worse, an animal. The way we desacralize the environment and turn it in to a thing comes also to mind. The way the police dehumanize enough to harm also comes to mind.**

**We in the faith communities need to remember our stories: nobody is a nobody. Humans aren't animals, and animals aren't that "low" anyway. Away in a manger, no crib for a bed. O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. While shepherds watched their flocks by night. The cattle are lowing, the baby's awake.**

**If the manger is any measure for our lives, we need to watch our slogans. Watch out how we do "good cop/bad cop," "good immigrant/bad immigrant", Eric Garner/Michael Brown. We have even begun to separate the Ferguson and New York and Cleveland stories into those dehumanizing categories: he deserved it, he didn't. He is the deserving poor, she is the undeserving poor. Beware the corrals of oppressive ideas.**

**People who call the cops pigs are outside the manger. They don't understand how much the police are people and not animals. Or how much the police who live outside of Manhattan really don't like those of us who live here. They drive in from Suffolk County or Staten Island. They are not pigs. If anyone is "piggy", it is the luxuriating rich, not the working poor.**

**Also imagine what it must be like to be one of the new generations of progressive mayors, to be the boss of cops and to make decisions about whether to use the corrals or not. Nelson Mandela made friends with his guards. That is task for us and progressive mayors as well.**

**We need to pay attention to our slogans. "Black lives matter." Actually all life matters. "Hands up." That is a great slogan except for the way it does us and them. It has a great vulnerability, a strong memory. And it demonizes. The manger baby is the one who refused to have an enemy. "Whose streets? Our Streets?" Yes, all of our streets, not just somebody's streets. "We can't breathe." Right, we can't breathe till everybody can breathe. Manger thinking is that nobody is a nobody. Universality, as opposed to oppositional thinking will go a long way right now.**

**There is a great quote circulating from the editor of the New Yorker: "All those police in Washington Square Park were there for the annual white riot of the Santa-Coms. We need to figure out how not to polarize cops and protesters, Santa-Coms and "us." Plus why insult animals? Or nature? Or natures? We humans are above neither, but instead a long side. The story of Jesus' birth is an animal embracing story. A manger is a fancy name for a bar or a crib, which is filled with warm, soft hay.**

**Cops are not pigs, we are not cattle, "coyotes" are not mules, and Erich Garner was not a gorilla.**