

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The weather forecast for the next few days is for blowing and drifting snow along with cold temperatures. In an attempt to think of something cheerful to pass along to you given this forecast, I began thinking about the beautiful weather that we had earlier this week. We had sunny skies most days and seasonally comfortable temperatures, too.

In addition to enjoying the nice weather these past few days, I enjoyed watching animals. Now, I'm not talking about watching them on television. For example, Punxsutawney Phil looking for his shadow on Groundhog Day, or the dogs and leopard choosing which team will win the Super Bowl. Rather, I am referring to watching animals in nature and looking at the tracks that they leave behind in the snow.

I kept noticing animal tracks as I looked out my window, when I was out walking and while I was driving. There were deer hoof prints and rabbit footprints. There were cat paw prints outside the parsonage (most likely from the cat that likes to roam around the neighborhood). On my way to Cashton, I saw the flock of wild turkeys, and the tracks surrounding them. Looking at a golf course, I noticed that some animals had been playing in the sand traps! The area where the sand trap is located, was covered with prints, but I was too far away to determine which animals had been frolicking there. Perhaps they, like us in our younger years, were enjoying playing in there sandbox!

After this cold weekend, when the temperatures become more comfortable, I hope that you will go outside for a walk, look for animals and if you wish, follow their tracks. If walking is too difficult, then take a ride and look for signs of wildlife. The Wisconsin DNR has information on their website about distinguishing animal hoof/paw/foot/claw prints. They also suggest some tracking guides--*A Field Guide to Animal Tracking in North America*, by James Halfpenny; *A Field Guide to Animal Tracks*, by Olaus Murie; and *Mammal Tracks*, by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. You can stop by your local library to check-out books and guides, too.

As we begin the month of February, now is a good time to experience nature in new ways. Taking a walk, or going for a drive, while looking for animals and/or their tracks, reminds us of God's creation and the beautiful animals that God has created.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy

