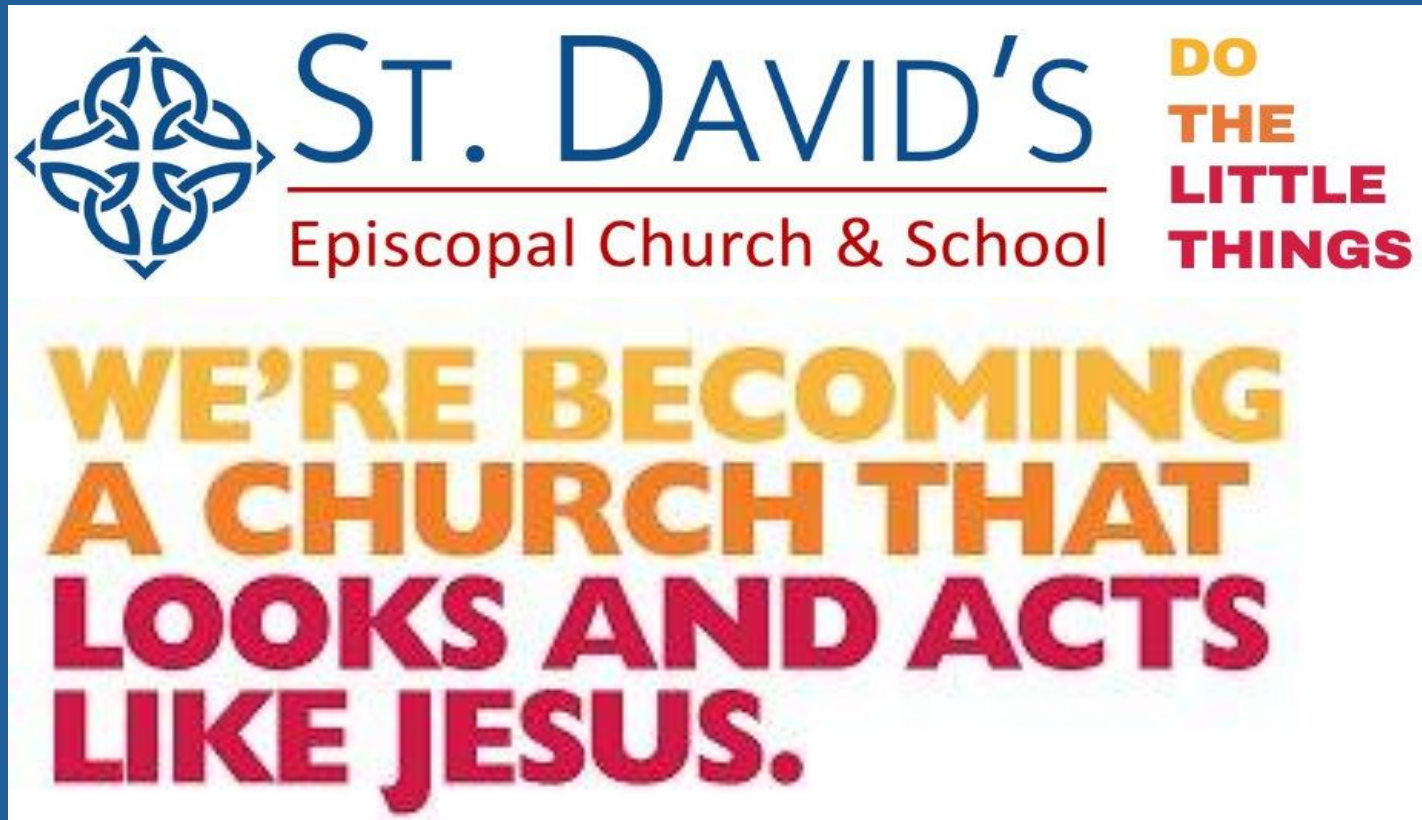


Families at 4pm – Blessing of the Animals

October 4, 2026





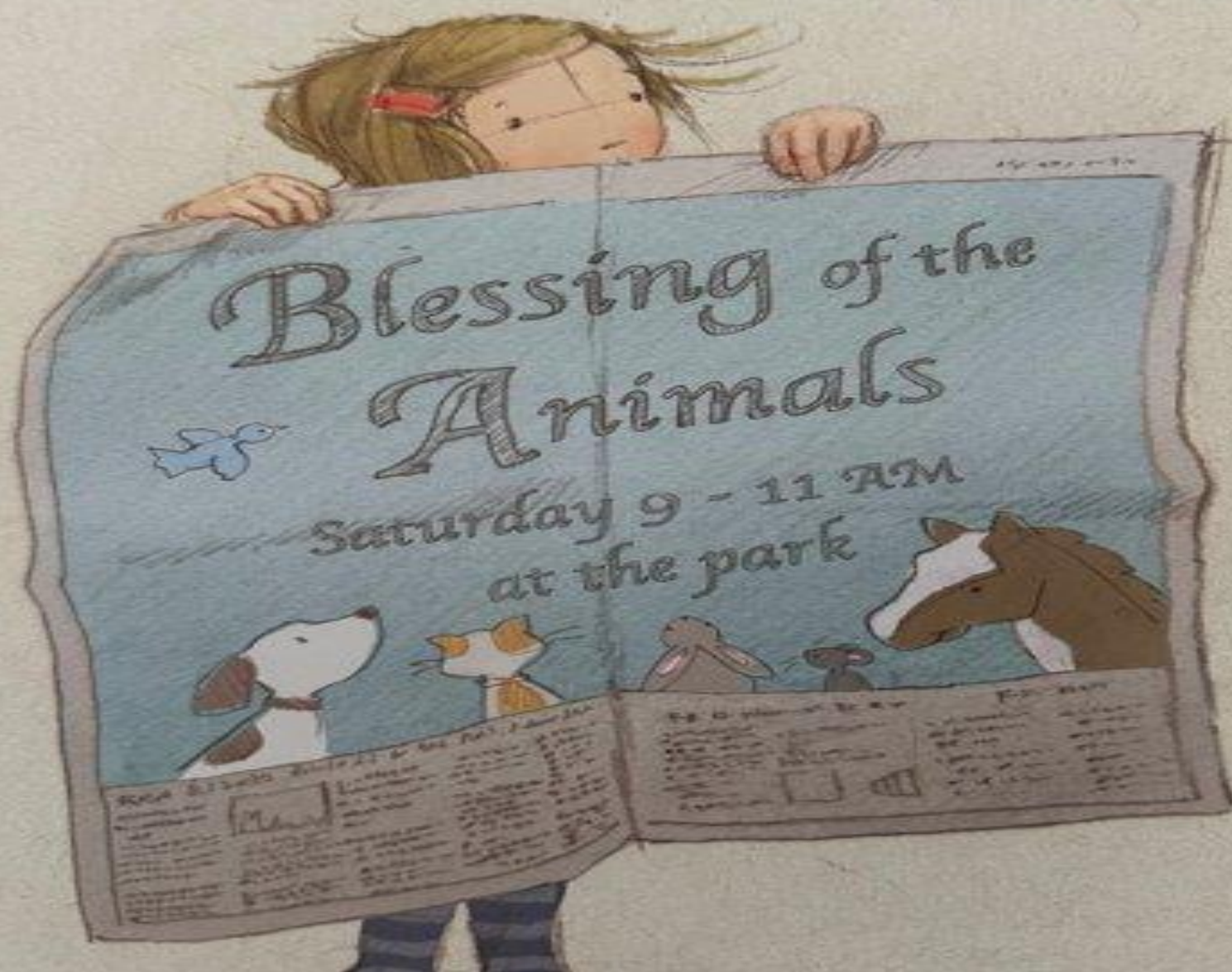


“You’re up early,”
Mom says.



“We don’t want to miss the
Blessing,” I say. “It only
comes once a year.”

I show Mom the paper again.



"The celebration comes once a year," Mom says. "But blessings are all around us."

"Like Star," I say, and I give him a hug.

"That's right," Mom says.

"I have an idea. Why don't you make some more leaves? After the Blessing, you can decorate the windows at the animal shelter."



Star helps me gather my leaf-making things.
We make big leaves, small leaves, smooth leaves,
and pointy leaves.







"You're going to get a special
blessing today," I tell Star.
"You too, Bonnie."



When we arrive, there's already a long line, and lots of animals.
I see dogs and cats. There's even a goat.

"Do you think they'll run out of blessings?" I ask.

"I don't think so," Mom says.



I watch the lady in the brown robe. One by one, the animals come up and she says something to each one.
"She knows a lot of blessings," I say.
Mom laughs. "She sure does."



Behind us, someone has a goldfish in a bowl. In front,
there are two ferrets on a leash, and a small dog in a basket.

"How does she know what to say?" I ask.

"I'm not sure," Mom says. "Why don't you ask her?"





Finally, it's our turn.

"I'm Reverend Mary Alice," the lady says. "You can call me Miss Mary. What's your name?"

"Madeline Finn," I say in my quiet voice. "This is Bonnie, and this is Star."





Miss Mary puts her hand on Bonnie's head and looks into her eyes. "Your gift is bringing comfort," she says.

Then she touches Star. "You have so much joy to share."

I look at Bonnie and Star. I can tell they feel good inside.

"How do you know what to say?" I ask.



Miss Mary smiles.

"Everyone has a blessing inside," she says. "We just have to look for it."

"Everyone?" I ask.

"That's right, Madeline Finn. Everyone has a gift to share. And once you find it, you have to set it free."

"Miss Mary . . ." I start to say.





"Do you have another animal for me to bless?" she asks.

"Yes, please," I whisper. Then I get on my toes. "They're not here. They're at the shelter."

"I see," Miss Mary says. She looks at her long line.
I can tell she's thinking. "Madeline Finn," she finally says,
"maybe *you* can bring the blessings to the shelter animals."
I look at Miss Mary. "I don't know how to do that."
She smiles. "Give me your hands."



Miss Mary wraps her hands around mine.

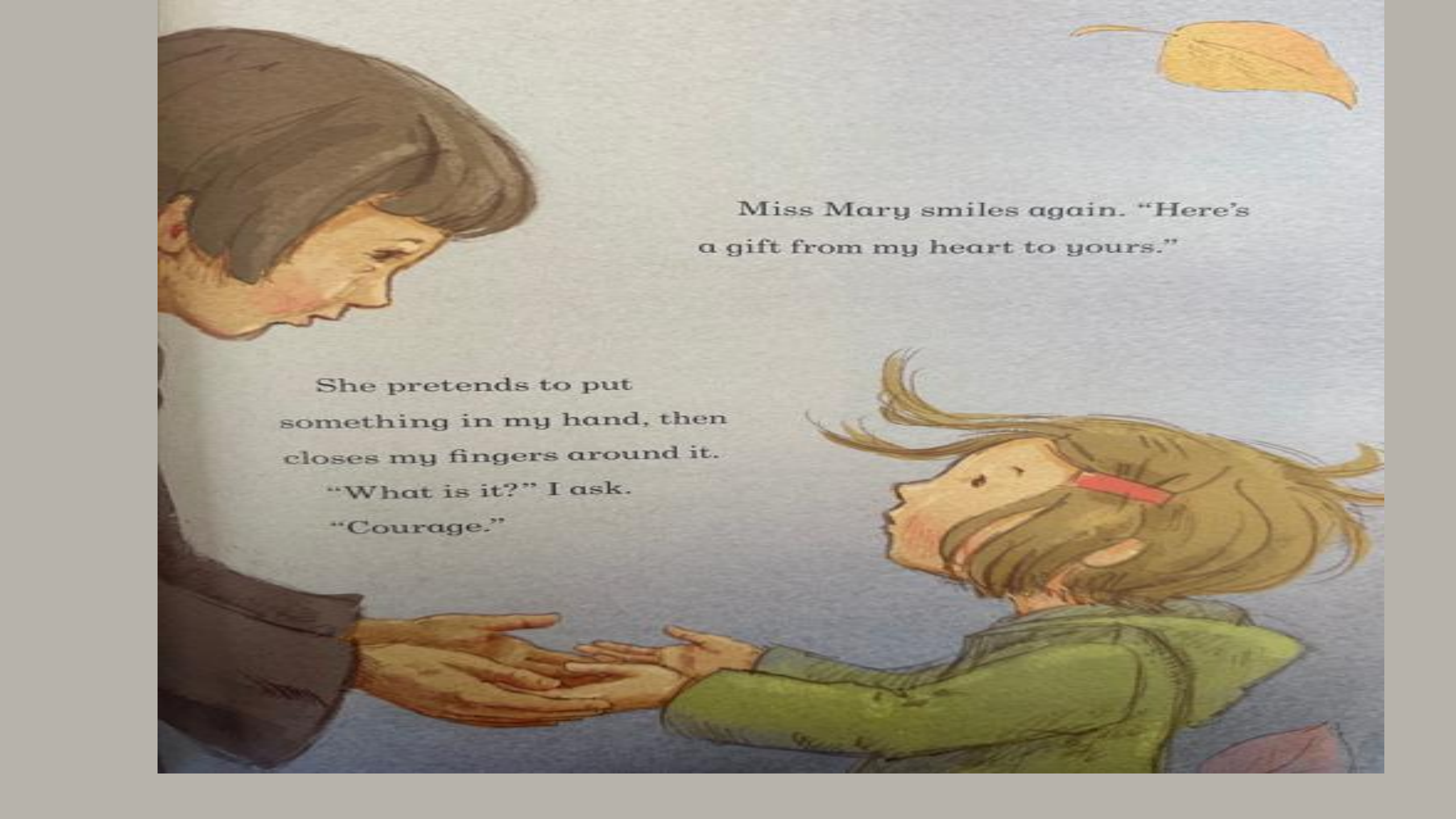
“Madeline Finn,” she says, “I bless you to know how special you are . . . I want you to remember all the blessings inside you.” She looks into my eyes.
“Blessings you need to share with the world.”

She gives my hands a little squeeze.

“How do you feel now?”

I nod, but no words come out.



An illustration of a woman with short brown hair, Miss Mary, and a young girl with long brown hair and a red hair tie. Miss Mary is on the left, looking down at the girl's hands. The girl is on the right, looking up at Miss Mary. They are both holding hands. The background is a light blue-grey color with a few yellow and orange leaves floating in the air.

Miss Mary smiles again. "Here's
a gift from my heart to yours."

She pretends to put
something in my hand, then
closes my fingers around it.

"What is it?" I ask.

"Courage."



“Did Star enjoy his blessing?” Mom asks when we’re back in the car.

“Yes.”

“And Bonnie?”

“Yes,” I say, kind of quiet. “Everyone got a nice blessing.”

I open my hands, but there’s really nothing there.

When we get to the shelter, I tell Mrs. Dimple all about Bonnie and Star's blessings.

"How lovely," she says. "Thank you, Madeline Finn."

"I'm proud of you," Mom says. "Why don't you do something nice with your leaves while I help Mrs. Dimple with donations."





Everyone's busy with the dogs, so we go into the cat room.
All the kitties stare at me. I don't know what to say.
Then Star gives me a nudge and I remember what Miss Mary
told me. *Everyone has a blessing inside.*
I go to the first cage.



"Hi, Winter," I say, and I notice his funny ear. "It looks nice on you," I tell him.

He puts his paw out and I touch it.

"You're going to make someone really happy," I say.

I reach into my bag and pull out a leaf. *I am special*, I write, and I tie it to his cage.





Next, I see a mama cat and five kittens. "Hello, Woolly," I say.
Her kittens climb all over her, but she doesn't mind.
I pick out another leaf. *I will take care of you*, I write.
I giggle when the kittens play with it. *We will make you laugh*, I
write on a leaf for them.



The next cat is hiding.

"Hello, Twilight," I say real soft, but he doesn't turn around. His card says he's thirteen years old and still looking for his forever home.

I will be your best friend, I write on his leaf, and I fasten it on.

Pretty soon, every cat has a leaf and a blessing!



Now, we visit the dogs.

"Hi, Shiloh," I say to the first one. I look into his eyes the way Miss Mary did with me. *You have a big heart*, I think, and he gets a big red leaf.

"Hello, Lily," I say to the next dog. She's really calm, and friendly. I talk to her a while and she just listens. *I like to hear stories*, I write on her leaf. "Maybe you could be a therapy dog one day," I say.



Sammy is in the last cage. He has a big, happy smile, and sweet, brown eyes. *I have a lot of love to give*, I write on his leaf.





Soon the whole shelter is filled with colorful leaves!

"Miss Mary is right," I say. "Everyone has a blessing inside."



I'm decorating the windows when Mom gives me a hug. "I saw your leaves," she says. And then she hands me one.



You're my little blessing, it says.



