



*Two Wolves*

Matthew 4:1-11

1st Sunday in Lent, March 5th, 2017

First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois

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A grandfather was once talking to his young grandson about temptation.

“There are two wolves living in my heart. One wolf is hungry for revenge, anger, hate, prejudice, envy, greed and violence. The other wolf hungers for love, peace, joy, grace, hope and forgiveness.” “Which one will win,” the grandson asked. “The one I feed. The same is true of you, grandson.”

There are two wolves that live in each of our hearts.

The temptations of Jesus occurred immediately after his baptism. Interestingly, Jesus was led into the wilderness of temptation by the Spirit of God - the Holy Spirit. For the longest time I always thought that temptation was bad. When I faced a difficult decision - some life changing, other not so much - I would pray my own variation of Jesus prayer about temptation. Rather than praying “lead us not into temptation,” as Jesus taught his disciples, I would pray something along the lines of, “Lord, please don’t tempt me. I am weak and I know that if I am tempted, I will fail.” I know all too well Paul’s lament in Romans; “I know what I should do but I do not do it. And, I know what I should not do but that is the very thing that I do. Wretched man that I am.”

But the temptation of Jesus was something that was important in the life of the early Church. It was important because those early Christians faced great temptation unlike that that we generally face. They were tempted to renounce their faith upon the threat of death. They were tempted to hide their faith in order to get a job. They were tempted to walk away from the community of faith, to neglect their worship life because they were too busy and involved in other things. To know that Jesus also faced temptation was comforting. And to hear how Jesus did not stumble gave them courage.

Jesus came out of his wilderness experience strengthened by the ministry of the angels and the knowledge that he knew what it meant to be the messiah. As the old country and western song says, “If you don’t know what you stand for, you’ll fall for anything.” The story of his temptation told the early church what their ministry was to be because they were to continue the ministry of Jesus.

After his resurrection on Easter the writer of Hebrews understood Jesus to be, in the words of the gospel writer in John, "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." That is why he could write that we have a high priest who was tempted in every way as we are tempted but he did not sin. This high priest, Jesus, intercedes for us because he knows we are weak. He is the source of our forgiveness.

In this season of Lent, it is good for us to reflect upon the temptations of Jesus and our own temptations. How he responded to his temptation is instructive to us in our own battle. "You shall not live by bread alone; do not put the Lord to the test; worship the Lord your God." You will have Scripture cards that you may use. I encourage you to read this Scripture card several times a day and reflect upon the words to Jesus. In so doing, may we feed to right wolf, the God glorifying wolf and be ambassadors of the Kingdom.

Amen.