

Where the Wild Things Are©

Matthew 4:1-11

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Book – “Where the Wild Things Are” by Maurice Sendak

After getting in trouble for being too wild, the little boy, Max goes off in his imaginary boat to the place where he comes face to face with the wild things that roar their terrible roars and gnash their terrible teeth and roll their terrible eyes and show their terrible claws.

Max not only faces them but conquers them, becomes the king of the wild things.

He tames them with the magic trick of staring into all their yellow eyes without blinking once and they become frightened and call the most wild thing of all.

Lent is A Wilderness place – Where the Wild Things Are

What are the wild things? The beasts that we face in the wilderness of Lent?

The wild things that roar their terrible roars and gnash their terrible teeth and roll their terrible eyes and show their terrible claws?

And what is the wilderness of Lent anyway? Why wilderness?

Bible and Wilderness

In Exodus the Israelites were led into the wilderness after Moses took them out of Egypt where they wandered for 40 years.

God led them there for a time to figure out their relationship with God and who they were as God’s people.

In the wilderness, the Israelites faced fears, frustrations, anger, death, their temptation to build and worship other gods, their hunger and thirst, their desire to be done with trusting God and to just get on with life. It took a long time for them to finally get out of the wilderness.

Jesus – was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to fast and to face – yes, his own wild things. The temptations of Jesus are good examples of the wild things we face in our own wilderness, don’t you think?

Jesus had fasted for 40 days. Now, if you’ve ever done a juice fast for a day or a few days, even though you’re getting plenty of nutrition, it’s still hard to do. The solid food that fills us up just isn’t there and our stomach’s begin to growl and hurt and we are hungry!

Who wouldn't be tempted to the point of giving in if you had fasted for 40 days and then the devil comes along and very sweetly says, "Hey, pal. We both know who you are. You don't have to be hungry any more. Whatever you hoped to accomplish with this fast, surely 40 days was enough time to do it. Now ... why don't you just say the word and ... shizam, turn these stones into loaves of bread! MMMMmmmmm. Doesn't a good loaf of homemade bread slathered with honey sound yummy?"

That hungry beast came jumping out at Jesus, roaring his terrible roar and gnashing his terrible teeth.

But Jesus did not give in. He looked that beast straight into his terrible yellow eyes and didn't blink when he said, "man does not live on bread alone, but on the word of God."

Next thing Jesus knew, the devil sat him up on top of the tip of the temple. He said, why don't just give in to the power of who you are and who is watching over you. We both know the Scripture says the angels will catch you if you fall. If you have such a great army of protectors, lets see you wake them up!

Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." '

And then Kawhammy! ... Another one comes. The devil cunningly says, "Oh Jesus. Aren't you a bit tired of this human thing you're trying out? Just think, you have God powers. You don't have to be out here in the dirt and the desert, all hot and tired and weak. Tell you what, I'll take you up here on the top of this high mountain and you look out at your kingdom.

Just so you know, it really belongs to me. But if you worship me, I'll give it to you.

Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." '

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

At the confirmation retreat yesterday we talked about how Jesus became human and experienced the things we feel and experience as human beings. If Jesus was a real human – then we can imagine that it was as tempting to him as it was for us.

Those temptations surely became the wilderness wild things that roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible teeth to Jesus.

Surely it was as difficult for him to be strong as it would be for you and me.

But Jesus did it. And Matthew says then the devil left Jesus and the angel came and waited on him. Jesus had stared those wild things in their yellow eyes and tamed them – and they left him for the time being.

The point of Jesus' going into the wilderness to pray and fast was to become strong and clear about the ministry God was preparing him for. And as he fasted from food, he would be praying more and focusing on his relationship with the Father.

He was led out to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit – an intentional leading for the purpose of having a time away from the busyness of life ... a time to honestly look at the wild things that could get in the way of his closeness with God and his life of obedience. And Jesus' destination would require great focus and total obedience as he became the suffering servant and went to the cruel cross that would finally conquer the wild thing of death.

When we come to this time of year – a time for Lent, for reflecting on what the wild things are within the wilderness of our own hearts, we can really only see them when we are removed the distractions that consume our days and keep our heads so full of noisy thoughts and our bodies so active with work and meaningless doing.

And so, we come to a crossroads – here at the beginning of the Lenten journey. You have to decide which way you're going to go.

Will you choose Easy Street? The shortcut to Easter? It's busy, but there isn't much danger of any Wild Things jumping out at you and roaring their terrible roars or gnashing their terrible teeth. You probably won't even think about the fact that they are present – somewhere hiding in the midst of all the conversations and relationships and work and home. You won't see them because you won't have time.

The Shortcut to Easter is basically a road that looks like life on a daily basis. It's easy because it's what you used to. And when you get to Easter, you can stand and enjoy the day with beautiful flowers and joyous music and maybe even an Easter egg hunt. You will celebrate Jesus' resurrection, but will you experience resurrection yourself? Will you have a moment of knowing transformation within your own spirit?

The other road is the long, difficult one. The Wilderness road where there is danger. You can be sure that if you take this road and don't back out – you will have Wild Things rolling their terrible eyes and showing their terrible claws, roaring their terrible roars at you. You will be forced to be brave – to stare them down – unblinkingly staring into their terrible yellow eyes until you have conquered each one.

Wild Things like: Cravings for

Food to fill your hungry stomach – craving for sugar and empty comfort,
for drugs and alcohol to numb you

Power

Greed

Fame

Fear

Craving for love, for beauty, for attention

The list could go on and on as you added your own Wild Things to it.

If you choose this wilderness way you choose to allow the Spirit to lead you into a lonely, quiet place, where life gets simpler and longer and you have fewer people around and less things to do. You purposely set them aside for another time – until the Lenten days are done.

The Wilderness Way is hard but so beneficial in the end. When you come to Easter after going through the wilderness, you come with a new freedom. You have acknowledged your Wild Things that get in the way of your most important relationship – that is with God who loves you and woos you out to the wilderness for the very purpose of getting close to you.

When you come to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, who once was dead and now is alive and is promising that new life to you – you will know exceeding great joy!

How brave are you? Don't forget, many of us are taking this long road on the Wilderness Way. Some will choose the shortcut and that's okay. You can still celebrate Easter. But if you want to become the king of the Wild Things –

Choose this way!

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