

**Quality Time with the Wild Beasts**  
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Theme:

The wilderness is the place where we face our greatest fears and our shadow side. This must happen in order to be grounded in our identity before we can live into the ministry God has in mind of us.

Mark 1:9-13 NRSV

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Introduction

If "2018 Me" could go back in time and talk to "2012 Me," 2012 Me's head would explode. Back in 2012, if you asked me what my life was about, I could have answered that question without hesitation. I had thought about it a lot. I would have said, "I am about being the best husband, father, and pastor I can be – in that order." These roles defined me.

When we go into the wilderness, the most important things we lose are not comforts, or security, or the familiar. What really shakes us to the core is the loss of our ROLES.

So losing a job can be a wilderness experience, but so can becoming an empty-nester. Or when you no longer have to care for your aging parent. Or when you retire.

More often than not, we continue to derive our sense of worth in what we do. For many of us, it is hard to believe that we matter unless we are doing something, being relied upon by others, being recognized for our contribution. We may remind ourselves that we are human BEINGS and not human DOINGS, but at the end of the day we still cling to those roles that give us our sense of self, our identity.

Over the course of five years, I stopped being a husband, I become a half-time dad (which is down to 25% or so as the kids become more independent), and frankly I wasn't surprised when God said it was time to put my role as pastor up on the altar.

So notice the sequence of events in this amazing short-yet-potent bit of gospel!

Jesus is baptized and declared Beloved. Baptism marks transition, from one state of being to another. In being baptized, Jesus both identifies with humanity, and models how we are to take the journey of transformation ourselves. It is a symbolic death, that is but the first "dyings" – when we are called to continually die-to-self in order become alive-to-God-who-is-Love. And at this moment, before his public ministry begins, long before Jesus has "done" anything to draw attention to himself in order direct attention to the Father and to coming Kingdom, God speaks a word of unconditional love and affirmation. "This is my beloved Child, and I am so proud!" As it is with Jesus, so it is with us: We don't have to do anything or prove anything to be claimed as Beloved by God. And the wilderness experience that follows is not about testing our worthiness. It is about coming to terms with our Belovedness.

The Holy Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness for 40 Days. That is actually what makes the wilderness so difficult. We might be willing to go if we thought we could prove our worthiness to God out there, or earn God's approval. But this

wilderness is about moving not about earning. It's about receiving, and accepting, and surrendering. The number 40 throughout Jewish and then Christian stories seems to be code for, "The necessarily long period of time to hit rock bottom."

tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Matthew and Luke give graphic descriptions of what it was like for Jesus to be tempted by Satan. But for Mark it is enough to simply give the tempter a title: The Accuser. The accusations all basically boil down to one thing. They call into question whether or not Jesus really is the Beloved. The temptations all basically boil down to one thing. If you really are Beloved, then you need to DO something to prove it.

One of my favorite authors, Franciscan priest Richard Rohr likes to point out that, by Jesus' day, there weren't any lions or other wild beasts roaming the countryside of Galilee. So Rohr suggest that "wild beasts" is a metaphor for how Jesus had to face his greatest fears and his shadow side. This must happen in order to be grounded in our identity before we can live into the ministry God has in mind of us.

Angels attended him. Because he had gone through this crucible experience, Jesus came out the other side anchored in his identity and therefore able to live out the ministry God intended for him.

### Conclusion

The wilderness is where we must struggle with our Belovedness, confronting the temptations to try to prove it or earn it instead of accept it and live into it.