
Holy Hacks: February 28, 2020

By the Rev. Julia Mitchener

... and he was with the wild beasts.

One of my children's favorite books is a classic called Doctor De Soto. It tells the story of a mouse-dentist who takes pride in being able to perform procedures on a wide variety of other animals, some big and some small. His only caveat is that he will not see patients who like to eat mice.

One day, however, a fox with a terrible toothache comes to his office and begs for help. After consulting with his wife, Dr. De Soto agrees to treat this predator. What follows is a funny, engaging, and often profound tale of embracing compassion and calculated risk in order to co-exist with those who might wish us harm.

This Sunday, the first Sunday in Lent, we will hear the traditional story of Jesus being driven out into the wilderness by the devil to face various temptations. There are three versions of this story, but the Gospel of Mark's has always interested me most. Why? Because of one sentence: "He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him."

... He was with the wild beasts. Part of Jesus' wilderness experience involved living with those who could hurt him. How did Jesus respond to this threat? The gospel writer doesn't really tell us, but it seems clear that he did not resort to violence, not even violence in the form of self-defense.

Like Doctor De Soto—and here, I must pause to say that this is the first time I have ever compared Jesus to a mouse!—like Doctor De Soto, Jesus is able to maintain peace with his foes. The analogy is not perfect, as Doctor De Soto uses a trick to ensure that his patient will not "outfox" him; Jesus employs no tricks, relying solely on divine protection. The point remains, though, that each of these is a story about learning to live with, and even love, one's enemies. It's hard to think of a more important lesson for our children in our deeply divided culture.

It's also hard to think of a more important spiritual discipline for those of all ages to practice as followers of Jesus—Jesus, the one who proclaimed: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you." There is more than one way of living in the wilderness. When threats arise and resources grow scarce, we can go the way of the world—the way of fear and mistrust, the way of hoarding more than we need, the way of preemptive strikes. Or we can go the way of Jesus—the way of hope, the way of courage, the way of love, the way of trusting in God's capacity to provide.

This Lent, you and I are invited to take a walk on the wild side. We are invited to journey with Jesus into the deepest, darkest recesses of our lives and of our world, in the conviction that at the end, we, too, will feast on the bread of angels. The journey will not be free of risk and pain—it never is. But we can choose how we make it. I wish you all a holy Lent.