

**St Andrew's on the Terrace Sunday 30 September 2018. Creation 5.
'Be-friending the Wolf Within'**

Hebrew Bible

Isaiah 11: 1-6

11 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—

³and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. ⁵Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. ⁶The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling^[a] together; and a little child will lead them.

Gospel

Matthew 8: 18-22

The Cost of Following Jesus

¹⁸When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. ¹⁹Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." ²⁰Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

²¹Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ²²But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

CONTEMPORARY READING

from Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype by Clarissa Pinkola Estés

The doors to the world of the wild Self are few but precious. If you have a deep scar, that is a door, if you have an old, old story, that is a door. If you love the sky and the water so much you almost cannot bear it, that is a door. If you yearn for a deeper life, a full life, a sane life, that is a door.

The Legend of Saint Francis & the Wolf of Gubbio

<http://tamingthewolf.com/saint-francis-and-the-wolf/>



There was in Italy the town of Gubbio, a prosperous village that had a great problem. A wolf was eating their livestock, and attacking the people. Nothing the townspeople did protected them from the wolf. Never had they seen such a fierce predator. He killed a shepherd, then the shepherd's brother and father when they went out to deal with this menace. The next morning the town was abuzz with the story told by the shepherd's mother and sisters.

The mayor of Gubbio announced he would send three of his best guards to find and slay the wolf that very afternoon. At dusk the townspeople could hear shouts and clashing of metal from the woods. Then it was quiet. The guards had met the wolf.

Late in the night the only survivor of the encounter struggled into the anxious town and collapsed. After he was revived, he told his tale of their fight with the fierce and powerful wolf. As the story rushed through town the wolf grew larger and more ferocious. Fear was in the eyes of everyone in Gubbio. Children were kept close by, weapons at the ready and the defences of the town raised. The mayor consulted with his advisors and decided to see if Francis of Assisi could help them. They had heard that he could talk to animals and that God talked to him. Several brave messengers were sent to find Francis and ask him for his help. They had the good fortune to find him in Assisi at the house of Bernardo Quintivalle, his first follower. They told him of the tragic attacks of the wolf and

how the frightened people were almost in a state of siege. They thought Francis was the only one who would be able to help them. They begged the simple Holy man to help and implored him to come with them right away.



Francis was moved by their plight and wanted to do what he could. He said they could leave in the morning and they should eat and rest with his Brothers that night. After dinner they prayed with Francis for a solution and slept that night with hope in their hearts. Dawn found them walking down the hill from Assisi on their way to Gubbio. In time they arrived at the woods near the town. The

messengers pointed to where the wolf had slain the two guards not far from the road. They stayed in a tighter group as they hurried the rest of the way, watching for the wolf.

The gate to the town was opened as they arrived and was quickly closed behind them. The entire town followed Francis to the town square where the Mayor eagerly met them. They went into the town hall to eat and discuss what Francis would do with the wolf. The mayor wondered what Francis could do with such a challenge. The mayor hated that wolf. He knew the men who were killed and their families. One of the guards was a cousin to the mayor's wife. If he were younger, he would have led the guards after the wolf. He wanted Francis to strike the wolf dead or send him to the town of Spoleto, their old enemy. Either would satisfy a need for revenge and stop the attacks. Francis listened as the mayor described what had happened to their peaceful town. He had much empathy for the families of the victims and wanted to meet the wolf and hear his story, too. Francis stated that the next morning he would go the woods where the guards had been killed to see if he could find the wolf. That night he prayed for the wisdom to find a solution that would benefit everyone.

Early the next morning, refreshed and confident this would work out, Francis was accompanied by the townspeople to the gates of Gubbio. They wished him well and retreated to their homes, worried that Francis would share the fate of the shepherds and guards. He walked on to the woods, ready to engage the wolf. As he neared the first stand of trees, the wolf appeared and began to stalk Francis. His slow, deliberate steps, the walk of a predator, announced his intention. He drew nearer and nearer, closing in a circle around the holy man from Assisi. Seeing the wolf, Francis felt a connection. He made the sign of the cross and called the wolf to meet him in peace under the grace of the Lord. The wolf watched as Francis came closer. "Come Brother Wolf, I will not hurt you. Let us talk in peace." The wolf froze in mid step. The wolf struggled with doubt and uncertainty. Finally, understanding that



Francis meant him no harm, the wolf walked to Francis and sat back on his haunches, ready to listen.

Francis told the wolf that he had come from Gubbio and described what the townspeople were experiencing because of the wolf's actions. He described the pain and resentment they held toward the wolf. "How did this come to happen?" Francis asked the wolf. "Why did you kill the livestock and people?"

The wolf told Francis his story. He had been left behind

by his pack because he was injured and couldn't keep up. He could only catch prey that didn't run fast, like sheep and goats. He really preferred to eat deer and rabbits, but, with his injured leg, that was out of the question. He explained to Francis that all he wanted was to eat when he was hungry. Francis implored him to explain his actions. The wolf continued. The first shepherd he had killed was trying to protect his flock and the wolf had no choice but to fight back and kill him. That afternoon two more men came after him and instinct took over. He quickly killed them, leaving their bodies where they fell. The next day the three guards came hunting him. He was only defending himself when he fought them. Two were slain. As the third man was no longer a threat, he let him go.

Francis could see that the wolf was only acting to fill his needs. He had made unfortunate choices that affected people of whom he knew nothing. Through Francis the wolf was able to feel the pain of the people in Gubbio and he felt remorse. He was sorry for the pain he had caused, but he needed to eat. What could he do? Hours passed as Francis prayed. The wolf watched closely, not fully understanding what was taking place, but sensing that Francis believed he felt remorse at having caused such pain. When Francis emerged from his contemplation, he quietly suggested an answer to the dilemma. It was a suggestion that could meet the needs of both the town and the wolf. He proposed to the wolf that the townspeople could feed him and, in return, the wolf would stop killing the people and their livestock.



The wolf thought this would work well for him, but worried the people would still want to kill him. Francis understood the wolf's concern and assured him he would present the idea to the townspeople in such a way that he would be forgiven and welcomed into the town. He knew they could let go of their fear and hate if they saw the wolf ask for forgiveness and accede to a peaceful relationship. Francis extended his hand. The Wolf showed

agreement by placing his paw in Francis' hand. Saint Francis and the wolf walked back to Gubbio. As they neared the gate, the citizens could not believe their eyes. Francis and the wolf continued to the town square, although the mayor and the entire town watched with hate and fear. The wolf had to keep his eyes on Francis to still his fear. Francis called out, "Come countrymen, the wolf will not hurt you. Let us talk in peace. I have spoken with the wolf and he apologizes for his actions and wants to make amends."

Francis told them the wolf's story. "He has the same needs as you and only wants to eat and not go hungry. Can the people of Gubbio feed him if he promises to never again take the lives of the people and their animals? Remember, our Saviour taught forgiveness. He taught us to love our enemies." The citizens returned sceptical stares. Francis continued, "This will be your wolf. He can't be killed or passed off to Spoleto or Perugia. He will serve the town as a defender as long as he will live." The citizens of Gubbio asked Francis to talk privately with them, to help them understand his suggestion. The Mayor guaranteed no one would hurt the wolf while they conferred.



The people of Gubbio talked with each other for hours. Relatives of the dead were the hardest to convince. They harboured a hard place in their hearts for the wolf. Francis wept with them and touched them in a way that softened their hearts. Finally, after many tears, they found compassion for the wolf. At Francis' suggestion, they addressed him as Brother Wolf. Francis asked the Mayor and Brother Wolf to declare a pact. The people

would be safe from the wolf. The wolf would be safe from them. Everyone expressed joy that the shadow of fear had been lifted from their town. The wife of the shepherd, the man who was the first to fall, brought out food to feed Brother Wolf. She was crying in relief to have the burden of hate lifted from her spirit. Brother Wolf was humbled when he found his apology accepted. More food was brought out and soon everyone was eating together. Word spread to other towns. Soon the people of Gubbio were proclaiming proudly that they had a special wolf, Brother Wolf. He lived another two years like that until he died, cared for by the generous and forgiving town of Gubbio.

The Reflection

St Francis is known as a saint who revered the natural world especially animals. There is a famous legend about him intervening in the relationship between an Italian, Apennine wolf and the town of Gubbio in the province of Perugia in central Italy. A very full version of the legend can be found on the

website belonging to the Taming the Wolf Institute which is devoted to training in Franciscan peacemaking. <http://tamingthewolf.com/ministry/>. I have also printed it with the written copies of the reflection today

I came across this story of Francis and the wolf recently. It is a sweet story, imputing great thoughtfulness to the wolf and great courage to Francis...one of those legends where you need to suspend a certain amount of disbelief in the very human sounding thought process of a wild animal. But hey, we do it in movies, why not with sacred legend?

In the legend, a town mayor whose village is threatened by a marauding wolf asks St Francis for help. Francis daringly goes out to speak with the wolf and manages, so the legend goes, to talk with him and find its reasons for killing not only sheep but also their shepherds. This touches Francis' heart and he explains the wolf's actions to the grieving and angry townsfolk. The work of reconciliation is slow. But finally comes this key passage in the story:

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Depth psychologists, and, I suspect, Jesus, believe we have two parts within us. The side we like to show to others is skilled, educated, polite, mannerly. It is the side which our parents and teachers socialised us to develop so we could get by in the world. As well as this persona however, as many of you know, we have a shadow side.

This side can seem a little scary as we have tucked it away out of sight, deemed it not fit for drawing room, behaviour and so we keep it hidden from polite society. This is the inner wolf within each of us.

Unfortunately, when we compare our shadow side to an untamed wolf we can assume that it is all bad – hungry, prowling around, seeking whom it can devour. This is very like a description of the devil which the writer of the first letter to Peter used “*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*” 1 Peter 5:8.

This can lead to us pushing the wildness within us further down and further away. Yet, amazingly, if befriended, just as in the legend it can become our joy and delight.

If imprisoned behind our polite veneers, the untamed wolf within can turn feral and angry. We become grumpy, depressed, fed up, irritable, annoyed. Watch yourself over the next few weeks – are you most grumpy when you have had little time to yourself or little time doing some activity you really love? Perhaps you are caging your inner wolf a little too closely.

Clarissa Pinkes Estes' in her *Women who run with the Wolves* encourages women in particular to find the wildness inside themselves - to run freely with the wolf pack, to enjoy their creativity, vitality, to find that spark within which makes life enjoyable, colourful and deeply satisfying.

Like the legend of the wolf, changing our orientation from caging the inner wolf to defriending it is not an easy road. Just as in the legend it took a lot of courage from the wolf to walk with Francis back into the town and it took tears and prayer and a great deal of forgiveness for the townspeople to befriend the wolf. So also we need to work at accessing and encouraging our shadow side. As the contemporary reading says – we may need to revisit old scars, or retell old, old stories which we might prefer to forget, we may find the route to the world of the wild Self is something we almost cannot bear. But, for a deeper life, a fuller life, for even a sane life we need to seek the doorway to it,

bravely open it and courageously step through it. You will probably need a companion on the journey too – a spiritual director, a therapist, a minister, a friend who has travelled that way before you, a trusted author, a new biblical interpretation.

When I was preparing this reflection, I looked for references in scripture to animals especially wild ones. The vision from Isaiah came to mind – it is a passage which has been taken to be a foretelling of the arrival of the Messiah - you probably have heard the saying quoted ‘the lion shall lie down with the lamb’ but this particular passage actually says “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together;” The passage lists pairs of natural enemies – to prove that, in this hardly-to-be-imagined world, former enemies can live together in peace.

It is not that the wolf becomes a lamb or the leopard becomes a goat or the Lion becomes a calf. They remain their wolfy, leopardy, lion-like selves. It is just that they do not devour out of their own hunger and thirst another weaker being. They are no longer destructive and harmful. They have been nourished enough and so do not need to kill to eat. (I know for those of you who are scientific, this ruins the whole food chain – suspension of disbelief remember?)

What does your inner wolf need, in order to be nourished and at peace, still its wild and wolfy self, but with a deep serenity that carries you through the coldest winter and the chilliest spring and the most disappointing times?

Your inner wolf might need more quiet, or more beauty, or perhaps more jazz. It might need to go to more movies, or walk more beaches. It might need more coffees with a friend or stimulating books to read. It might need you to learn a language, meditate more, do the right thing less, pick up a paintbrush, create a men’s shed, write that poem or novel or play. It may need more training or less, less structure or more. It may need a study group or a sharing group or more prayer or meditation. I can’t tell you what your inner wolf needs so it feels befriended and therefore able to live together with others and their needs without becoming starved his or herself. Only you will be able to find that out for yourself.

I have been avoiding using the word ‘tamed’. The whole point of a wolf is that it is a wild animal. It has that edge of uncivilised sparkiness; it is vital, unexpected, sometimes rough and ready and unapologetic. When you are operating out of your inner wolf you may not fall in with others’ plans. You may not be entirely polite. But, a nourished wolf within, reconciled with itself is able to simply sit, to interact peaceably, even if at times firmly, with others. It is able to play,

Impossible? – well yes, unless, we have a Francis-like or a Jesus-like figure who can call us, reassure us and companion us on the way.

Jesus chose the wild side of life. We can be thankful he did. He experienced an even wilder side of life than the wild animals around him, for he said that even foxes had their dens and the birds of the air had their nests, whereas he had nowhere to call his own home, nowhere he could lay his head, nowhere he could be private and at rest.

It was the wild wolf within Jesus which confronted his own disciples when they wanted the best seats in heaven, which reacted firmly when Pharisees rebuked him for healing on the sabbath, resisted when his own family pressured him to come home and live an ordinary life and which stood up to Pilate when he wanted an easy excuse to let him go.

Are we allowing that to flourish within us? *We* can approach the other well when *we* have approached and befriended the other within *ourselves*. It will take more courage to look within a befriend that wolf than to fix up a hundred other people or change fifty others.

On the screen will appear a few pictures of Apennine wolves, the type of wolf which Francis befriended in the story. The images change slowly from snarling and howling to sitting and playing. As the music plays, allow yourself to befriend your wolf within. Encounter your anger and perhaps your pain in the first few slides. Then you might like to relax into the calmer more playful pictures.

Talk with yourself about what truly nourishes you, what truly satisfies and calms you and so, perhaps, discover your doorway which will open you to a deeper fuller life. Maybe a life in which you howl and snarl less and play more.

So may it be.

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