

FCCS November 16, 2019  
Rev. Curran Reichert

### “The Wolf You Feed”

Several years ago singer/songwriter Carrie Newcomer released an album called, *The Beautiful Not Yet*. She wrote a song that has stayed with me and it came to mind as I was preparing to speak to you this morning. The song is a story about her father’s influence in her life, it is called, “You can do this hard thing.” It chronicles a father’s support of his daughter through the challenges of growing up. It is clear that Newcomer understands the profundity of her father’s words, for they instilled in her the powerful knowledge that she could endure and survive even the worst of times.

I think it is fair to say we spend much of our existence trying to avoid hard things. I do not think this is because we are inherently lazy, but because we are afraid, afraid that we can’t do hard things. Psychiatrist Carl Jung theorized that life is generally organized around two fears; we either fear losing our minds or we dying- some of us fear both. Perhaps we think doing hard things might push us over the edge, we might lose ourselves somehow; mentally or physically. Yet some of the wisest ones have said we must lose ourselves in order to truly be found.

When we avoid doing hard things it is generally because our ego is predicting a negative outcome. That is what the ego does, it tries to predict the future. Well here’s a bit of good news, the ego cannot predict the future- it simply cannot. So whatever negative aspersions it casts in our thoughts, they are simply not based in reality- it’s just the ego spinning out of control and trying to predict an outcome.

When we are doing hard things our job is to stay focused on the present moment. To continually, even ritualistically draw our consciousness into the now; through breath, an awareness of senses, and our surroundings. Coming into the present moment is the best way to get through hard things.

And listen to this...

*“Alice laughed. ‘There’s no use trying,’ she said. ‘One can’t believe impossible things.’*

*I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.'* — Lewis Carroll

Friends we do hard things by believing we can. History is on our side here, look at your life. Heck, just look at the past week, haven't you already done many, many hard things? Probably six before breakfast, maybe seven. So, whatever it is you think you can't do- I am here to tell you today that you can, but it may require a shift in your thinking.

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life:

“A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy.

“It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil- anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

The other is good – joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you—and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: “Which wolf will win?” The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.

The mind is a powerful thing and let's face it- we are capable of finding justification for nearly any point of view we wish to hold; let's say we want permission to drink more wine or eat more chocolate. We find articles promoting wine and chocolate as tools for heart health. See! They're good for me. If we want spend money on more clothing, or a bigger house, or better car- we convince ourselves we have an image to maintain, or that we need that extra bedroom, or we simply haven't got a thing to wear.

We have an amazing ability to convince ourselves that we *need* things that we actually don't need at all- we just **want** them. We want them so badly that we construct elaborate stories for ourselves to justify having them. I don't say this to make anyone feel bad- we all do it all the time, but just because we all do it doesn't mean it's right.

We have to become conscious about it doing it so that we are better able to choose the wolf we feed. This is a hard thing to do. Today's text, although it may not appear so at first glance, it is an invitation to consider the distinction between wants and needs.

This passage seeks to present Jesus predicting the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, as well as more general catastrophes that are preceded by an intense persecution of Christians. It is important to note, however, that this passage was written some fifteen years (85 ce) after these events actually occurred. In point of fact, these words reflect hindsight more than prediction.

The core message, however, is timeless and invites us to consider the aftermath of such destruction. It asks us to think about what we value most; If our faith in God is wrapped up in buildings, finery, and sacred symbols- what remains of that faith when all of those things are gone. The passage insists that we grapple with the impermanence of human achievement and instead consider prioritizing acts of love and compassion.

When all is lost, what is left? (gesture to the congregation) This is what is left, what we have is each other. What we have is in here (pointing to the heart). This teaching, is an effort to redirect followers to focus on the poor, the imprisoned, the widow, and children rather than the temple itself. The use of apocalyptic language is, oddly enough, designed to offer assurances that even when bad things happen, God's people should not live in fear. Picture Jesus saying to us this morning, "You can do these hard things."

So, it is my friends- whatever it is, the choice is always ours to make. To overcome our fear, to feed the right wolf, the life we live is ours to decide. The assurance of God with us, obviously does not insulate us from loss or destruction, it is there to support us through difficult choices and turbulent times. Like a loving father's voice, God assures us that we are stronger than we might think. We can endure and survive even the worst of times, believing we can will make it so.

Amen