

Even though the Lenten season centers primarily on the 40-day wilderness journey, reading this text once again highlighted for me a provocative thought that I had not previously considered – that, during His time in the wilderness, Jesus was also reconciling creation by being with the wild beasts. After all, Mark’s description of Jesus as “with the wild beasts” does not seem to suggest any hostility or resistance; rather, it conveys the overcoming of enmity and Jesus’ peaceable presence with the animals. In fact, throughout Mark’s gospel the language of Jesus “being with someone” almost always conveys a close, friendly association, as . . .

- . . . Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners (2:15)
- . . . Jesus chooses twelve disciples apostles to be with Him (3:14)
- . . . Jesus explains parables to those who were with Him (4:10)
- . . . after Jesus heals the demoniac, the formerly possessed man begs to be with Jesus (5:18)
- . . . after Jesus feeds the 4000, He gets into the boat with His disciples (8:10)
- . . . on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with Him (9:2)

And so, even as Satan is tempting Jesus to renounce God’s calling and pursue a different agenda, Jesus is seeking to fulfill Isaiah’s vision of messianic peace, where the wolf shall live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and a little child shall lead them (Isaiah 11:6). The Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness, in order to reconcile all creation and to till the soil of the wilderness with God’s grace, so that humans and other animals may live together in the peace and harmony of paradise.

Similarly during these forty days of Lent, we may be wandering our way through a wilderness and encountering a different set of wild beasts. Invisible viruses continue to slither into our communities; the herd of political animosity is growling around us; and the impact of climate change is howling across the earth.

But even in our wilderness, Jesus is with us, just as He was with the beasts in the wilderness, carrying the brokenness of the world and reconciling us to one another, to creation, and to God. And although Jesus ate nothing for those forty days, He will feed us in our emptiness and comfort us in the wasteland of our sorrows.

Indeed, through the One who is with us to reveal God’s grace and love, we may (if we look closely enough) discover that even now Jesus is transforming the wilderness of Lent into a new garden of Eden.