

## Wednesday in Holy Week Year A

### The Light Shines in the Darkness

[RCL] Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:21-32

You've probably heard the story of the two wolves. It's often told as coming from one of the various First Peoples, usually Cherokee, but it's one of those stories that is so pithy and true that it almost doesn't matter what the real source is...it gets passed around and told and retold, over and over, because we all sense how true it is...because we've all experienced it ourselves.

It goes like this.

There are two wolves, and they live inside each of us. They are always fighting. One is darkness and despair...it is fed by, and produces, things like anger, envy, greed, arrogance, lies, false pride, and ego.

The other is light and hope. It lives for, and produces, things like joy and peace, humility and generosity, faith, hope, and love.

These two wolves live in each one of us, and they are constantly struggling for dominance. And the question is always...which one wins?

The answer is always...whichever one you feed.

There's another story that has been passed around and told and retold. It's a story that many in our contemporary world only know in very broad outlines.

It's about a good man, a wise counselor, a wonderful teacher. Some say he was divine. We say he was the Son of God. He ran afoul of the authorities and was killed. Then he rose again. It's a story we all know here in the church, we're all familiar with it.

We're familiar with it, because like the story of the wolves, it tells our story, our true story. We are a part of this story just as the wolves are a part of us. We absorb the details of this story every time we move through Holy Week.

We participate in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, with the palm branches and the shouts of "Hosanna." We know that the king has come riding on a donkey. We know this because we've seen amazing things, miraculous things: Lazarus raised from the dead, for example. He was there at dinner just a few nights ago.

And the night Mary took all that oil, so much of it, such an extravagant gesture, and anointed Jesus.

Almost as if she was preparing him for burial. And Judas was upset because he thought it was a waste of money. Judas often worried about money.

Jesus asked God to “glorify his name.” And there was this sound, this incredible, uncanny sound, it was a voice that said, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” And Jesus said, “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.” And then, he said something about being lifted up, and drawing all people to himself, and about “walking in darkness” and us becoming “children of light.”

This is our story. Darkness and despair, light and hope, doubt and conviction. We each have all of that inside of us. We walk in the dark and try to be bearers of the light. Or we try to walk in the light, but live in fear that our own darkness will be revealed. Either way, we know this to be true. Darkness and light, despair and hope both come as part of the package.

We tell and retell this story every year. And every year there is this moment when someone close to Jesus betrays him. We don't like this moment, but we know it to be true because we've all felt the icy pain of betrayal when someone close has turned on us. And we've all felt the sickly shame when we've betrayed someone else. We've all felt the darkness flood in and threaten to overwhelm us.

You can feel it now. That dark wolf, the night in our veins. There is darkness all around. Judas has just left. The authorities are anxious. Everyone is on edge.

Will the Romans crack down? Will there be raids and deportations? Perhaps even executions? When Judas leaves, John makes a point of saying that it is night. You can hear the wolf howling at night. We know what's coming.

The darkness will grow. The arrest. The trial. The crucifixion. By tomorrow night, that wolf will threaten to devour all of us. By Friday, Judas will not be alone in the darkness. Peter will have denied Jesus. We all will have deserted him. And when someone asks, “didn't I see you with him?” We will all deny it and say, “No. I don't know him.”

But we also know how this ends. We also know that this is not the end. The betrayals and the denials are not the end. Even death is not the end. We know that beyond all of this darkness, past this night, there is an empty tomb.

Yes, inside of us there are two wolves. One is darkness and despair, and one is light and hope. And it really does matter which one you feed.

As children of the light, we are called to spread the light, and with it to spread joy and peace, and faith and hope and love. And it also matters that we remember—as we enter the darkest nights of our story—that no matter how powerful the darkness seems to get, that we are never alone. Because we have Jesus—“the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”

We have Jesus who has walked this road before us, and who continues to walk this journey with us.

It is important to remember that no matter how ravenous the dark wolf gets that we are not alone, because we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Saints who have also been through trials who have had doubts and faced despair, who have stumbled and fallen, but who have continued, and “have run with perseverance the race.”

It is important to remember as we enter these Three Holy Days that the darkness will come but the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.

Amen.

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