

Words of Encouragement 'The People We Meet—The Wild Ones'
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Pastor

Jesus knew lots of Wild Ones. In his days on earth, he met them in his travels, down by the river—like John the Baptizer.

Jesus continues to meet up with Wild One even after his resurrection...like Paul, who he met up with on that road to Damascus.

And these particular two that we read about this a.m. were really Wild Ones...the 'Wild for God' kind of people.

We know that John was filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth, according to the Angel who visited his father Zechariah. And John stood there in the middle of that Jordan River, like a prophet from the days of old, with the power of Elijah, intent on turning the people of Israel towards the Lord God and preparing them for the Messiah, through the forgiveness of sins.

Paul too...Lot's of energy and intensity. Did you hear all those rapid fire questions he asked of the Ephesians:

Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?

Did you take God into your mind only, or did you also embrace him with your heart? Did he get inside you?"

Once Paul was convinced of something...he put his heart and soul into it—whether it was the right way or the wrong way. Praise God, he was changed by his encounter with Jesus, from the inside out, to use all of that wild energy to bring Jesus to those around him. And he was wild...for God.

One of the Wild Ones that Jesus met along the way.

Have you ever known people like that? Even one person? That you may have met on the way? Someone Wild for God?

I've searched my memory banks...and keep coming up blank.

Maybe it was my suburban, Chicago up-bringing. Not too many Wild One, Wild for God Ones in the suburbs. Although I did get into arguments with the Jesus People on the Chicago Northwestern train to downtown sometimes. But I would have to say they were more earnest than Wild.

Maybe it's just my particular path through life that has yielded so few 'Wild Ones, Wild for God Ones.' Of course, I know lots of people, even here among us this a.m., who love God deeply and faithfully. Strong love and devotion type people. But they aren't really Wild for God and Crazy about it.

I've heard lots of 'Wild for God' preachers. I've even been known to have an occasional outburst of wild rhetoric but once you get us preachers out of the pulpit, we usually calm down and act cool.

I have to wonder if being Wild is a little out of style these days.

But if that's the case, then why does my brain keep turning up songs and books and movies with 'Wild' in the title. Can't you think of some?

Wild Thing

Take a Walk on the Wild Side

Born to Be Wild

The Children's book: Where the Wild Things Are
Wild Wild West

'Wild' is in the culture but none of that wildness really relates to God, does it? Isn't it more about being young and foot-loose and fancy free and even self-destructive. Wild in the sense of breaking all the rules and doing whatever you want rather than doing what you're supposed to.

I think a lot of us kind of like our "Wild" to be theoretical...or should I say theatrical? Once removed from our own personal lives. It seems better to keep 'wild' at a little bit of a distance before it does any damage to our plans, our well-constructed lives. Because wild can be disruptive and even destructive. I get that. Think about it:

What happened to John the B—that 'Wild for God' one who stood in the River and baptized Jesus? He died on the dance floor of King Herod's palace. Yes, accepting the freedom and the power and the wild that God offer us, has its dangers.

Tomorrow is the Rev. Dr. MLK Jr. birthday/holiday. He was Wild for God. He knew darkness when he saw and he trusted in light to overcome it. See the quote on the front of the bulletin. He called out hatred where he saw it and experienced it and then he announced the power of love...the wild and personal and transforming love of God that can change the hardest heart and the cruelest institution. But we know what happened to him. Shot at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis TN on April 4 1968. Being Wild for God can be dangerous. But where would we be today if MLK hadn't gone Wild for God?

And of course, there's Jesus, himself. The Wild for God, Son of God...He brought the light. From him flows the water that makes our baptisms possible. His wild and indiscriminate love has lit fires of faith and love all over the world. But, as the song says...*We meet you, O Christ, in many a guise, your image we see in simple and wise. You live in a palace, exist in a shack; we see you, the gardener, a tree on your back.* Yes, Jesus died on the cross...in fact, Jesus even said to the people as he preached to them in the Gospel of Matthew: 5:10 *Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of God's rightful justice. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.* How wild is that?

Persecution, because of wild and right living for God, can open the doors of heaven to those of us who would rather stay home and be safe but golly that 'Wild for God' thing just keeps following us around and catching up to us, doesn't it? In Bible Reading. In sermons. In the challenges that come up in our lives. And that's because....

God, you know, is the original Wild One. Am I right about that? Wild and artistic enough to create the world and plants and the animals and us. Wild, and yet gentle, enough to make clothes for Adam and Eve before kicking them out of the Garden. Wild and strong enough to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Wild and crazy enough to make a covenant with Abraham and Sarah and then Isaac...saying, I will be faithful to you and make you as a light to the nations. More numerous than the stars in the sky.

God is that Wild and God has a burning desire to put some of that Wild in each of us. We are, after all, created in the image of God so why shouldn't we get at least a smidgeon of that God wildness? Through our baptism.

The Holy Spirit baptism that Paul talks about...that John talked about...is a wild and powerful force. Powerful enough to be changing people from the inside out. Changing people so that from the moment of their baptism...they praised God because they wanted to, not because they were supposed. From that moment on...their hearts became brave and they talked about God's actions freely and gladly and joyfully---not because they read about God's actions in the Bible but because they could see God's action in their lives. They could see God at work in their hearts and their families. In their churches and in their communities. And Wild for God type people, they want to tell other people about what they see because what God does is so grand and so amazing and so...wonderful and yes, even so very, very Wild.

God's Holy Spirit is so Wild, that it works differently at different times with different people. Look at the altar area...and see what you can see of the way the Holy Spirit works....Sometimes the Holy Spirit is wild and free like that dove, descending from heaven saying with the voice of God...This is my son with whom I am well pleased. That was pretty wild. Jesus hadn't even done anything yet. He was at the very beginning of his ministry and God is already pleased with him. That's pretty wonderful!

God's Holy Spirit is sometimes wild like water...moving. Flowing. Pounding rocks in to sand. Rewriting the geography of the continent. Changing. Freezing and evaporating but always Jesus says...I am the living water. Drink from me and you will never thirst again.

Then again, God's Holy Spirit is sometimes Wild like the Flames of Pentecost. Remember how great it was to have a flame for every person in this church on the walls last summer? This picture on the screen is so vivid...the one flame with the rest of the row just waiting to be lit up. On fire for God. Wild...for God. Why not?

The Wild Ones for God in the Bible, the Wild Ones you meet on the way...they are, like all of us, children of God. Doing the best they can to do what God wants them to do. That's all any of us can do...the best we can...remembering that when God gets inside of you, God's wild and wonderful Spirit, can and will make all things possible. So that you too will want to...and be able to...let your light so shine before others, that they will see your good deeds and give glory to your Father in heaven for all that you do. Dangerous, maybe. But wildly wonderful. Definitely! In Jesus name.