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Isaiah 11:1-9  
**Your Lamb and Wolf**  
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When Isaiah wrote his prophecy, it was a frightening time for the Hebrews. Real frightening. It felt like they were going to be devoured by the Assyrian armies who were about to invade like hungry wolves.

You know what that feels like. You also live among the wolves. You work with the wolves, and maybe for a wolf. You teach your children to survive among the wolves. You keep an eye out for the lone wolf on the dark streets. You work hard to make enough money to keep the wolves away from your door. The last thing you ever want is to be thrown to the wolves. And yet when you come to church, what do we keep calling you but little lambs?

“Don’t worry,” we say, “The Lord is your shepherd. He knows all of his sheep by name.” That sounds real good in church, but there are wolves out there, and they have a way of eating sheep.

It even seems like it is supposed to be that way. Wolves have a natural appetite for lamb. Where did that come from, if not the Good Lord who created them? Several years ago when vacationing in the Canadian wilderness, in my morning devotions I read the biblical promise that God feeds all of his creatures. Then I spent the day noticing how God does that in the wilderness. He feeds them to each other!

That’s why we don’t live in the wilderness, and why we do all we can to avoid the wolves. We move to communities where it is easier to raise our little lambs in security. We hang around the church a lot in search of nicer people. We quit our jobs and look for a nicer place to work. But to our surprise when we get to the place where we thought the sign out front said “No wolves allowed” what we find is that we have simply taught wolves to wear sheep’s clothing.

There is no escaping the wolf, because it lives inside your own soul.

As frightened as we are of the wolves around us, some of us are more frightened of the wolf within us. We fear being angry, wild, or bold in what we believe. It’s not that we don’t think the wolf is inside us, but we just don’t much care for it. We fear what may happen if we assert ourselves and we are terrified of conflict. So we keep the wolf caged, which allows us to think of ourselves only as the gentle lambs who climb up into the Shepherd’s lap to get a little scratch behind the ears, and have all of our needs met for us like children who are afraid to be adults.

Others of us, by contrast, are not at all scared of the wolf but are frightened of the lamb within us. The last thing we want is for people to realize we have a child-like tender, vulnerable side. That’s because the last time we tried to be the lamb, someone hurt us. Someone we trusted. The hurt was the worst thing we ever experienced, and we swore we’re never going to let that happen again. So we buried the lamb within us. “From now it is all wolf all the time.” But how has that worked for you?

Everyone around you may be frightened of you, but some nights when the loneliness is overwhelming, wouldn’t you give anything for someone to hold you, and say I love you? As frightened as the lambs are among us, I think the wolves are even more frightened. They are afraid they may succeed in pushing people away.

God created both the wolf and the lamb. God loves both the wolf and the lamb. You were made both assertive and vulnerable, and then God called this creation “good.” You are never going to be free from fear, until as Isaiah says, these two creatures within you learn how to live together.

Now, how do you do that? Wolves and lambs do not live together easily. We try to do this in different ways. Our favorite, is to be a wolf sometimes and a lamb at other times. At work we are the wolf and at church the lamb. In sports, wolf. In the home, lamb. With the enemy, wolf. With friends, lamb. The problem with this is that our hearts can't keep up with our schedules and before you know it someone is bringing that wolf stuff into the home. Then your family and friends get eaten alive in a place where they thought they were safe. You can't divide your life up between the sacred and the profane, trying to live with two different personalities in two different places. Sooner or later the wrong creature will get loose in a place you don't want to see it.

The challenge is not to divide our loyalties between the wolf and the lamb but to integrate them into one personality who is at the same time assertive and vulnerable, a leader and a servant, as cunning as a serpent and as innocent as a dove. In other words, the challenge is to be fully human as one who is neither tamed nor dangerous.

We all live in a world that only knows how to divide us between aggressors and victims who often become aggressors creating more victims. Until we teach the wolf and lamb to live together, this will always be a frightening jungle. The place where we learn how to do that is not out there, but in our own souls.

The Divinity School of the University of Chicago recently released a report that claimed 87% of Americans believe the country is in moral decline. (I don't know what the other 13% were thinking.) According to this report we are not going to find a new morality in this country until we develop a new definition of what it means to be a human being. Its recommendation is that we are going to have to stop thinking of ourselves as isolated individuals and start thinking of ourselves as being intrinsically social creatures. In other words, we have to develop deep loyalties to the people around us. Then we will become human beings again.

That is what the University of Chicago recommends, but I don't think that's going to work. I think that it's the people around us that scare us and make us act like we are either angry wolves or frightened sheep. I think that if we want a new definition of what it means to be a human being we are going to have to stop looking at others long enough to first look at the creator of human beings.

As long as your life is focused only on those around you, either the wolves at work or the lambs at home or in the church, you will become their creation. And they don't want all of you. They want to recreate you in their own image of goodness. They won't say that. They will say that they are just helping you to improve, but what they really mean is that they want you to be less than you are - less lamb or less wolf. Either way, it means being less human.

This is why we come to worship. We come to encounter God's Word about who we are and how we should live our lives. You cannot stand regularly in the presence of God without being changed. And the most profound change is that you get to be who he made you - both wolf and lamb.

When the Creator of life gave us a living illustration of what it means to be human, who does he send to us but Jesus Christ. The gospels call him not only the Son of God but also the Son of Man. The church has argued for so long that Jesus was divine that we have forgotten he was also human, in fact, the embodiment of pure humanity. He is called both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God. He was assertive, so assertive that he could stare down the Pharisees in arguments and turn over the table of the money changers. He was vulnerable, so vulnerable that he went to the cross dying for our sins, not the least of which is the sin of not being fully alive.

When Isaiah promised that in Christ we would find the advent of a new kingdom so different that the wolf and the lamb can live together, he knew it would require a transformation of nature. It would also require a transformation of human nature which is the primary source of our problems in this world. If we are going to find that transformation of nature, Jesus is going to have to be more than a teacher. He can't just write another report on how to have a more civil society. No, Jesus came to do what we could not - to restore us to the created nature we had in the Garden of Eden.

This is part of what we mean when we call Jesus our Savior. That doesn't just mean that he has fixed things so we can go to heaven. It also means that he has saved us, in this life, from being less than human. He has freed you from the tyranny of living by others' expectations of your life. He has reconciled you to the God who alone creates and defines you and who wants you to live all of the life he has given you.

Do you see? Jesus Christ was dying to give you your life back. He does that by giving you his life. So the point isn't to work on your wolf side or your lamb side, which is just silly pop-psychology. The point is to worship. Worship here on Sunday mornings and through the daily devotional life at home. Because every day you will encounter so many voices that try to redefine your identity, in conflicting ways, by making you less than God did. But in worship you attend to the work of the Holy Spirit who gives you the life of Christ who restores God's image in you. In Christ, the Apostle Paul said, all things hold together - the wolf and the lamb. *Amen.*