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Pastoral Nature Notes
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The Masked Bandit

One morning last week I was in the woods very early. It was a cold crisp morning the fallen leaves crunched like potato chips with each step. Where the ground was bare, the frost having frozen the topsoil made it like hardened sugar granules which would shatter when stepped on. The air was crisp and gave an inviting openness to the lungs. After finding a bur oak tree, I carefully pulled all the leaves away from the trunk so that I could quietly traverse its circumference in order to stay quiet and hidden from any inhabitants so as not to alarm them. Without any wind there was an abundant brickle silence.

As I was enjoying this unique silence it was suddenly shattered! Something was coming, and not quietly. It seemed like whatever it was had no care of being heard! The frosty snapping leaves were giving away the presence of an un-wearied creature. Then he appeared, lumbering along. Appearing almost to roll over the frosty leaves like a bowling ball, a raccoon. Remaining in the shadow of my concealing tree he eventually caught sight of me. Startled by each other's presence he in a dash of uncomely surprising speed he caught the nearby Basswood tree where he fixed himself in the trees low Y and peered at me through his Zorro like mask. His face carefully hidden in the shadow of his tree; I was surprised to see a raccoon on such a cold morning but he was more surprised to have been caught red handed on his way to a hollow tree for a day-time nap after a night of excessive eating the fruits of others labor!

Raccoons in the Fall have to eat a lot like bears do. They then go into a dormancy and rely on their fat reserves. In order to facilitate this, they must be non-discriminating in what they raid, and gluttonously eat!

Certainly, Raccoons have their niche in the ecosystem, however don't be deceived by their good looks it is a disguise so you don't see them in the night. In the light they are as cuddly as a newborn puppy and in the night, they raid and eat other's plight. Robbing crop fields, chicken coops, preying on roosting bird's upland birds their quest for a full belly never ends. Raccoons really like us as humans, raiding our dumpsters and garbage cans! This doesn't make them evil creatures. It is who they are scavengers!

These scavengers marauding as masked bandits can teach about what to look out for. The Lord in Matthew 24 says, "Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken

into.” We are to be prepared for when do not know when the Lord will come. Yet likewise we do not know when temptation will come. Temptation is the masked bandit of sin! Sin presents itself as something good: cute and cuddly, Yet, it’s mask like that of the raccoon is meant to hide its true self. The true self of sin emptiness that in most cases results from overindulgence in some type of selfishness. Like raccoons, sin does not produce anything itself it just scavenges good things from those who often don’t have much like the small upland birds who have their nest raided by a clean cut and washed raccoon.

There can also be people especially in public and American cultural life like this. They look good in public. But when they are caught, they think they are not seen they are lumbering along without any regard for anyone else. They are only focused on themselves and their full belly. Then when caught they run hide themselves and peer suspiciously at their captor as the guilty one! The Lord warned of these types who were the Pharisees in his time. “Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice.” (Matthew 23:3)

As the days roll by, continue to find places for quiet prayer. Move the crunchy leaves of the things of life and find some silence for it is in silent prayer with the Lord that we come to be able to see the masked bandit of temptation lumbering its way toward us to interrupt our silence and our relationship with the Lord.