

## **Wondering in the Wilderness** **A Lenten Homily by Margit Griffith, DRE**

First Reading: Luke 4: 1-4, 13-15

Second Reading: "Halfway Down" by A. A. Milne

Hymns: Peace Like a River, From All the Fret and Fever of the Day, Every Time I Feel the Spirit

The first Sunday of Lent...

The Season of Lent...

Using the Christian liturgical calendar as a guide, this is the time churches reflect on the 40 days and nights Jesus spent in the desert - in the wilderness - before he embarked on his ministry here on earth...

The traditional Lenten Fast was... is... supposed to bring Christians closer to Jesus' experience and create a better understanding his path... his life. Jesus went into the desert without any supplies.... so fasting in the old days (or giving up chocolate today) is a connection with that experience. Abstinence is often the focus of spiritual reflections at this time of year. What are we willing to give up?

Perhaps its self-serving, but I can't help thinking about the time and space Jesus had before embarking on the most significant part of his life. He actually TOOK the time to pause, reflect, listen for his father's voice, wrestle with his demons... The Spirit called him to it... and he had the sense to listen and act... and had wilderness close at hand. At that time and in that place, there was plenty of wilderness to get lost in.

For those of us parenting and managing a home, working and taking care of aging parents, being active in town, church and the wider community - sorting, packing and downsizing, looking for a house with another bedroom for another expected child... we've got a lot going on and not much wilderness to which we can escape.

And now, with the relative respite of winter coming to an end, things are only getting busier. Folks are returning from vacations and warmer winter retreats... School is in full swing with after-school sports and activities starting again... Here at First Parish, our "regular" RE classes will resume... we're gearing up for annual meeting... in the garden Crocus will soon trumpet reveille for spring clean-up...

And let's throw in some late winter snow to clear and clocks to change.

Sandra Boynton's song "Busy Busy Busy" from the "Philadelphia Chickens" song collection for children and families says just about everything there is to say about the fret and fever of our busy days - at a frenetic, Gilbert and Sullivan pace....

We're  
Very, very busy  
And we've got a lot to do  
And we haven't got a minute  
To explain it all to you  
For on Sunday Monday Tuesday  
There are people we must see  
And on Wednesday Thursday Friday  
We're as busy as can be  
With our most important meetings  
And our most important calls  
And we have to do so many things  
And post them on the walls...

...it goes on. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwQTjf0HTk8>)

40 days and 40 nights sounds pretty good. But is unrealistic.

Let's bite off what we can actually chew... maybe try to find a moment and a place to accept Lent's invitation to the wilderness... it's an embrace of finding that time and space to *not do*...

During Lent, we look for the possibility of deliberately finding - of making - the time, and a physical or psychological place, of quiet - a real wilderness, or at least one we can create in our minds - to slow down, unplug, step back... breath, think, listen...

Living in Lincoln, we have the gift of acres of conservation land. We can ask, "Whose woods these are... I think I know..." as Robert Frost wrote; or

Like, Thoreau we can go, "... to live deliberately..." Maybe not for a whole year at Walden, but even for twenty minutes or an hour.

Did you know this sanctuary is open 24/7? It's a wonderful... sanctuary. The peace here on a weekday afternoon is lovely.

When we can't make it out into nature, or into a space like this, we have to be a bit more resourceful...

Each of us has a place "of pure imagination..." - thanks to the community children's choir for reminding us of the wilderness of our own minds. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVi3-PrQ0pY>)

JK Rowling's character, Harry Potter, was thrown into a place of contemplation... before Harry's biggest task, he is transported to a place where he has time to consider his next move. There, he finds his lost friend, Professor Dumbledore. When they're done speaking and Harry is about to make his big decision, he asks, "Professor, is this all real, or is it just happening inside my head?" Wisely, Dumbledore replied, "Of course it's happening inside your head, Harry, why should that mean that it's not real?" Head space is sacred space.

The wilderness, the woods, halfway down the stair, a corner of your mind...

Often, for me, it's the shower. Parents of younger children, you may not yet be able to imagine an uninterrupted shower... and, truth be told, even with a couple of teens in the house, uninterrupted anything is not guaranteed. But it comes - and you find the quantity of time isn't as significant as what you do with it.

Sometimes, it's not easy. When we go into the wilderness, we bring ourselves. I bring my cares, concerns and to do lists, my prejudices and judgements, my criticism of self and others. All these voices whisper at me... like the Devil whispered to Jesus... of all the things that can lead me off track from my mission... my life - or that part of my life that I'm hoping to lift up and move to the next level through reflection.

If - when - we can banish those thoughts... tame those devils... reject the intrusions... we open a little space... the space we need to let in a little inspiration - divine or otherwise. Sometimes the inspiration is something like "God is love, do unto others, meek inherit the earth..." or "there is an eightfold path to liberation" and sometimes it's "hey, why don't you sing a Gilbert and Sullivan inspired children's song to the congregation on Sunday." I'm not saying everything that comes through will be pearls.

But you never know unless you make it happen. You can't win if you don't play.

The wilderness, the woods, halfway down the stair, a corner of your mind, the shower...

Five minutes... twenty... an hour... a day...

At the end of each children's chapel, we have a guided meditation based on the morning's lesson. Let's take a moment right now to find a quiet place...

Please find a comfortable position

Take a deep breath and close your eyes

Imagine a place you find peaceful, try to make it real in your mind.

Remember to breath...

If something else tries to enter into your mind, imagine it floating away down a river.

Come back to your special pondering place and see it.

Here is your place

Now is your time

Now, come back to this place we are sharing.

The first Sunday of Lent. The Lenten Season.

This year, instead of giving something up, perhaps you can add a little something into your life... reach out and grab a little piece of peace.

May you return to your place of inspiration as often as you need and as often as you want.

May it be so.”