

Where the Wild Things Begin  
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Matthew 4:1-11  
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A few Saturdays ago, Kyle and I decided to take the family on a day trip to Long Beach Island. The sun was shining, and although it was chilly, it was a great day to be outside, breath in fresh ocean air and get the kids to nap in the car.

After we got home, I sorted through the pictures we took from the day – pictures of us smiling and looking like we were having a great time. But as I went to post it on social media, I paused. For the pictures showed us having a *much* better day than we did. I thought about how often we do that. We post happy smiling pictures, giving the impression that we have our lives all together. So I decided to write about our day along with the happy photos. I wrote:

“Today I dragged a screaming toddler out of a library. Kyle carried a toddler 217 stairs up a lighthouse. I fed a fussy, squirming infant in the parking lot of a state park. We both argued with a whining toddler on the sea wall because she wanted a snack and *did not* want to see the ocean. We both, on 2 separate occasions, changed our baby’s diapers on the bathroom floor of a restaurant because there were no changing tables ANYWHERE. I chased a toddler around a bar after she ran out of the bathroom before I was finished. But here’s some pictures of us smiling and having a good time.”

We’re living the dream.

I wonder if more of us don’t have similar stories behind our pictures and posts. The difficult moments that we’d rather not share. The truth that are lives are messy and complicated. The vision of us being simply in survival mode. Maybe even that some days we’re just hanging on by a thread. Because the truth is, we’re all in the same boat. We lead mess, complicated lives. Lives with times of sheer joy, times of sheer heartache, times of stress, times of pure love. Sometime all on the same day.

Because we’re all in the wilderness together. But so often we hide from the wilderness.

So this Lent, we are bringing the wilderness in. For wilderness means: the state of the wild. So what is the state of your wild? Where do your wild things begin? Where is God with you in the wilderness? To answer, we're bringing the wild, untamable parts of our lives inside to live with us here.

We are doing this in physical ways. On Ash Wednesday, we made wilderness vases, which now adorn our sanctuary and will for the remainder of the Lenten season. Each element in the vases represents a wilderness of our lives:

Sand to remember that we've been in the wilderness since the beginning of time – since the Garden of Eden

Branches to remind us to shed the old things so that new things can bloom

Stones to mark the journey with prayers written on them for this Lenten journey

Moss to remind us that the wilderness is a place of new and resilient life.

These physical vases remind us of the state of our wild lives. For we are bringing the wilderness in in spiritual ways too. For Lent always, always begins in the wilderness. Each year, on the First Sunday of Lent, we read the story of Jesus' struggle in the wilderness – where he fasts for 40 days and 40 nights and is tempted by the devil to take on ministries other than what God intends for him. To feed himself instead of others. To test God instead of trusting God. To take over the world instead of saving the world. Jesus begins his ministry right here. In the wilderness. The temptation story happens directly after Jesus is baptized in the Jordan by John. Before Jesus calls his disciples or heals a leper or calms a storm or tells a parable, he goes into the wilderness. For the Wilderness is Where the Wild Things Begin.

For Jesus does not end up in the wilderness by accident. Instead, Matthew tells us: Jesus was “led by the Spirit *into* the wilderness” (Mt 4:1). Jesus is baptized, declared as God's beloved Son, and is “led by the spirit into the wilderness.”

The first thing Jesus does in his ministry on earth is to have a difficult time. He fasts, he prays, he wanders, he resists. He is shaped and formed in the wilderness for his journey ahead.

Perhaps the first thing we do in any new endeavor is to have a difficult time. We struggle, we learn, we fail, we listen, we resist, we get frustrated, we lose sleep, we find new ways, we persist. We are shaped and formed in the wilderness for the journey ahead. Our wilderness might not be a literal desert. It might be a wilderness of grief, of change, of loss. Our wilderness might be finding our way in our polarized culture, or finding our way through a difficult season, or finding personal growth and discovery.

In the wilderness, Jesus finds spiritual strength despite physical weakness. He holds fast to God when everything else seems to be unraveling. For the gift of the wilderness “to discover how courageous, how steady, how faithful” we can really be.<sup>1</sup>

For the wilderness is filled with both devils and angels. The wilderness makes us resilient and strong. The wilderness is a place of new beginnings.

So just as the angels provided Jesus with food during his wilderness journey, I am providing you with some spiritual food for your journey as well. In the form of resources. This morning, you have been given your Lenten Devotional, entitled Wilderness. We will be looking at this every Sunday until Easter, so I encourage you to bring it back with you each week. We will be looking at the Poem and reflection together. At home, I encourage you to do the other devotional pieces. Each week has an Art & Reflection and a Coloring & Reflection. Along with these, there will be a daily devotional prayer posted to our Facebook page each day.

So with this spiritual food, let us begin. Please turn to page 5 in your devotional. Let us read together the Poem,

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<sup>1</sup> A Sanctified Art, Sermon Prep Guide, Slats Tool Commentary, pg. 2

“The Wilderness is a Place of Beginnings” by Sarah Are.

“Begin again,” life whispered in my ear;  
For some days are beginning days.

Some days are designed to be the day we try again,  
And on those days—the sun rises for you.  
On those days, the birds sing for you.  
On those days, God is cheering for you.  
That’s just the way God and beginnings work.

For when your heart is broken and your life is in pieces,  
Or when the addiction or the depression have found their way back into your bones,  
Or when you lose sight of the person that you were called to be,  
The wilderness will sing to you, “Begin again.”

“Begin again” with the person you want to be.  
“Begin again” with the person you want to love.  
“Begin again” with the knowledge of your faith.  
“Begin again.”

The sun is rising for you.

The wilderness is a place of beginnings. In the next few minutes, I am going to leave you space to reflect on the state of your wildness. The journal prompt on page 6 asks you to “Identify something in your life that is beginning or just getting started. What is your prayer for this beginning?” I want you to think about that question and then make that prayer more concrete. You can write it there first, but I’d like you to write it on the rock you were given as you came in. There are sharpies on the edges of your pews. Pass the sharpies down to share and write your prayer on your rock.

Write Down your Lenten Prayer. It could be:

- A Beginning
- An ending
- A prayer for someone
- Maybe something you want to give up
- Or something you want to take on

When you feel ready, I please come forward and place your stones at the foot of the cross, as we continue to bring our wilderness into this place.

**Matthew 4:1-11**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. <sup>3</sup>The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ <sup>4</sup>But he answered, ‘It is written,

“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” ’

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup>saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you”, and “On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”

<sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” ’

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; <sup>9</sup>and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’ <sup>10</sup>Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” ’

<sup>11</sup>Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

**Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7**

<sup>15</sup>The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. <sup>16</sup>And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.’

<sup>3:1</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God say, “You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?”’ <sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup>but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.”’ <sup>4</sup>But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die; <sup>5</sup>for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ <sup>6</sup>So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.