

Worship at Home for September 27 2020

You may choose to read right through this document, stopping for your own reflection at any time, or only read the prayers or the scripture or reflection. You might read with family or friends, or alone. Links will take you to music that may enhance your experience as you move through the worship, but you might choose to visit them later, or not at all. Feel free to share this with anyone who might be interested.

If you'd like to comment or have a question, please call or email me directly:
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In the Spirit

Rev. Joanne

This week's Worship at Home continues to celebrate the Season of Creation, with the theme of "wilderness".

Centering Prayer

Holy God, surround us with your peace in our wilderness times.
Draw us closer to you – the one who provides, the one who
quenches our thirsts, the one who abides with us.
Amen

Opening Music: "All Who Are Thirsty" MV 4
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCwDtSFMjdw>

Opening Prayer/Prayer of Confession

The Lord's Prayer Liturgy (*From Limestone Presbyterian Church, "The Lord's Prayer and Creation Care: A Litany of Confession," written by Revs. Bruce and Carolyn Gillette.*)

Loving God, we remember that Jesus taught us to pray saying, "Our Father..."
You created us, you made this world, and you called your creation very good. Yet often we forget that you are our loving Parent who continues to bless your world.

Jesus told us that you are "...in heaven..."
Yet we fail to live in awe of you. We take you for granted, and we don't see the awesome beauty of the world you have made.

We pray, "Hallowed be your name..."
We confess that our reverence for you does not always lead us to care reverently for your earth, sky and sea.

We pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..."

We confess that we often put our own interests first-exploiting your creation, and living for our own convenience and self-interest.

We pray, "Give us today our daily bread."

We confess that we consume more than our share of the world's resources, while billions go hungry every day and your whole creation suffers.

We pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

We confess that we see these words only in spiritual terms, while the Bible is filled with teachings about economic justice and creation care.

We pray, "Save us from the time of trial."

Help us to resist the temptations of spending more, using more, acquiring more, and wasting more.

We pray, "Deliver us from evil..."

Free us from greed and self-centeredness that separate us from you and others.

We pray, "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever."

Help us to know that in caring for your wonderful world, we are working for your kingdom, being good stewards of your creative power, and giving you glory.

We pray, "Amen."

We end our prayers with "Amen," a word that means "let it be so." We know we can be faithful disciples by your grace. Amen!

Scripture Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, 'Give us water to drink.' Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?' But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?' So Moses cried out to the Lord, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.' The Lord said to Moses, 'Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.' Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'

Reflection

The Israelites are just beginning their wilderness wanderings that will bring them to a new land and a new way of life. No longer slaves in Egypt, they will become free and independent people.

There might be some bumps along the way, they may have to learn to trust their God, and they might feel they have to cry out for what they need at times.

Although months have passed, we are perhaps just in the beginning stages of living in the wilderness of the COVID-19 pandemic, and certainly just at the beginning of living with the disease in our global society. As we learn about the disease and how it spreads, as responses like a vaccine are created, we will become less enslaved to the restrictions that have so far kept us relatively safe, and will learn behaviours that continue to keep us safe. There have been, and may be, bumps along the way, we may need to continue to trust that God is with us, we may feel the need to cry out at times.

I am not suggesting that our present circumstances are 'just like' those faced by Moses and God's people, but there are certainly similarities. And perhaps that is the richness of these ancient stories of the relationship between God and God's people – we can still relate to them today. We can still find ourselves in a variety of wildernesses, vulnerable and needing God's care.

The wilderness implied in this Exodus story is a barren one, rocky and dry. The people had just been provided with manna and quails because no food could be found, and now their pressing need is water. The wilderness cannot provide them with what they need most – only God can do that.

Have you experienced a time in your life that felt like you were wandering through a wilderness? Perhaps it felt like wilderness after a loss, or during an illness, or coping with family issues. Did you sense that God was able to provide for you through the actions of others, or through your own faith?

We know that, in reality, what we call 'wilderness' like the remote forests of British Columbia, or the secluded lakes of Northern Ontario or the vast (and worryingly shrinking) ice sheets of the arctic, are actually full of life. We know that what they produce such as oxygen and plankton help to sustain life on the entire planet. Wilderness places on the earth are not always barren, although life there is not always easy for humankind. Desert places, wild places, spaces that seem inhospitable to us are essential to the well-being of all creation. I believe without question that God is in those places and spaces, that they can be just as sacred as our sanctuaries – perhaps more so because there are no barriers between the Creator and what has been created.

For many, the chance to spend time in these wildernesses is challenging but so rewarding, so awe-inspiring. Earlier this year, Applewood was visited by both explorer and cave diver Jill Heinerth and writer and explorer Adam Shoalts. Both of these individuals shared their passion for traversing places and spaces that many of us would consider wilderness. What they found was beauty, danger, and a connection to the earth and creation in exceptional ways. While we may not be able to follow in their footsteps literally, we can read about their experiences, we can be inspired and informed by what they share. We can be reminded that God has created beauty that few eyes may see, interconnectedness between the tiniest creature and the largest mammals, and a home for diverse and fascinating life.

Wilderness times, as difficult and challenging as they can be, may also be rich and full of life, although we may need God's presence to help us discover what we need and how to find it. It may take the faithful efforts of others – like Moses who provided needed water at God's direction – to help us emerge from our own wastelands. I believe we are also called to be that presence, that hope, that sustaining love of God for others. We can reach out a hand in friendship that may be the lifeline someone needs as they wander, we can add our prayers and our energy to the world, we can support our local Foodbank which in turn may offer life-giving sustenance to others in need.

May we acknowledge our own wilderness times, celebrate creation's wilderness spaces, and know that God is always with us.

Music: "Garden of Life" Pat Mayberry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wlmRfMpa9Ws&list=PLz-IInMevuwXCDXWW0dNaOFnLXC6cj0n&index=6>

Prayers of the People

Holy God, in the quiet of our own spaces, surrounded by our possessions and all that is familiar to us, we bring our thanks and our grateful hearts. We offer our thanks for the places that bring us comfort, but also for those that might challenge us and help us to grow our perspectives. We thank you, God, for patterns in desert sands, and the hidden roots of icebergs, we offer our gratitude for unexplored ocean depths, and untouched mountain peaks. Remind us that your love and compassion can be found in the comfortable and in the challenging, and that your presence permeates rock and tree, urban city-scapes and distant tundra, straight roads and twisting forest paths.

We pray today for all those who find themselves in a wilderness place, where hope seems distant, where the future seems uncertain. We offer our prayers for those experiencing the wilderness of loneliness, illness, anxiety or loss.

Inspire us, God, to be open to being your answer to the prayers we make. We pray in Jesus' name, who knew the wilderness at your command, and showed us how to be faithful followers through it all. Amen

Closing music: VOCES8 - Earth Song by F. Ticheli

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qZ4u_2ZAic

Blessing

May the God of all creation, of wilderness and home,
of barren spaces and fertile places,
walk with you and bless you this day and all days.

Amen

Wilderness - Taylor Davis (Original Song)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vxi9CWITiw>