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Grace and Holy Trinity Church  
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One summer in the mid to late 90's a fellow student in my school back in PA went on a family vacation in the woods of Michigan. She wandered off, exploring, and she couldn't find her way back. Sarah spent two days in the wilderness. For a long time when listened to any of the stories about the wilderness in scripture, I thought that the closest I would get to it was that my sister sat with Sarah on our ride to school every morning.

You see, I'm not a wilderness seeker. I don't long to be in the great outdoors, hiking, climbing, and exploring the wild places, are not my cup of tea. Give me a blanket and a good book by a fireplace, and I'll travel in the safety of my own imagination, thank you very much. I didn't seek out the wilds, I didn't go into the deep dark wet caves, or splash in the streams, or feel

the need to explore beyond the comfort of my front porch. My idea of roughing it much like my mother is the Holiday Inn.

Much to my husband's disappointment, he enjoys hiking and camping and communing with nature. For his bachelor party weekend, they spent the weekend in the Shenandoah Valley during 2011, the Snowpocalypse- Halloween Storm. He and his friends convoyed out of the valley and spent the night here in Richmond after the park shut down. Again I wasn't there; I safely tucked up in Manhattan with my comforter and our dog and a pile of wedding-related decisions to make.

For a long time, I thought of myself as wilderness adjacent. Other people had wilderness experiences; I had wilderness imaginations. Other people had the wind on their face; I had poems about the wind on my face. Other people had the drive to find strange new worlds; I was happy to be where I was at any given time. I moved, and moved often, I traveled but always intentionally, always with a plan, I didn't wander. It wasn't until I was in my 30s and

got diagnosed with depression and anxiety that I figured out that not all wildernesses are physical.

In the 40 days of Lent, we get to be present in the wilderness. This invitation can be frightening, disorienting, and exciting. It can be overwhelming or part of our daily life already, it can be wholly other or wholly familiar. Only we can know our own wilderness experience, and while each of our wilds is uniquely our own, there is something innately human, innately familiar in these experiences. In the wilderness, we, like Jesus, are seeking nourishment, seeking salvation, seeking the grace of God. To find solutions to our longings, we allow our temptations to lead us to think that we can figure it out on our own. If we just do XYZ, then everything will be okay. The temptation to come to the table only for solace only and not for strength for pardon only and not for renewal is reflected in our wilderness as well we come drawn by the Spirit, seeking God but finding temptation. We ask in our daily prayers for Our Father to deliver us from temptation. We fall into sin again and again and again by our own fault

by our thoughts, words, and deeds. We are not sin adjacent. Not one of us is blameless. Not one of us is in perfect union with God, one another, and all of Creation. We do strive for this but fall short, and again and again, return to the Lord. Seasonally, yes, but daily as well, honestly for me, it's sometimes hourly.

The great thing about Lent and this reading, in particular, is that at the same time, we feel defeated by a temptation which we all feel to put ourselves above others, in the role of Savior, or deny goodness in our selves and the world God made. We are not only unified in our sinfulness but also our forgiveness. The forgiveness that God has given us through Christ, and with Christ and in Christ is real. It is as real as the angels who came and waited on Jesus when he denied Satan and all his offers.

We do not need to feel powerless against our sins. We are empowered by the Spirit to go into the wilderness and reacquaint ourselves with God. There is no one way to navigate the wildness in our lives. There is no one way to find God. If we endeavor to do so honestly and

openly, and we recognize, confess, amend our ways realizing that God's grace has been at hand in all of the aspects of our lives, we can be in a right relationship with God, with one another and with Creation. What we learn and relearn whenever we get drawn out of our comfort zones; what we learn and relearn whenever we get invited to the table; what we learn and relearn as we experience our Lenten journey is we are beloved. Even in trials and adversity, God grants forgiveness, and we are reconciled to one another, God and Creation, through our admission that we are in the wilderness, and we are lost. We do not know the way back home by ourselves; we just need to sit still and wait for salvation. Like my childhood friend Sarah, like Andrew and his friends in that snowstorm, and like Jesus standing atop the high mountain tempted by Satan, in the wilderness, sometimes we just need to sit in the uncomfortable knowledge that we are lost and need God to find us.

As The Rev. John Newton's Great Awakening Hymn reminds us - We once were

lost but now are found, were blind but now we see. Through grace, we learn to love God, love our neighbors, and love ourselves in the way that God loves us. The idea that God loves Godself in Jesus' human form. Through the ministration of angels.

Our needs are met by God's grace, by God's mercy and God's angels at work in our wild places. The sibling mystics St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila embody this for us to explore in our own time and our own ways. Whether your wilderness is exile to a convent or imprisonment and the dark night of the soul, God makes Gods' self known to us in interior and exterior ways. We need only be aware that we are in the wilds to have our hearts broken open and repaired by God's grace and mercy and love. We do not need to spend the night in the woods, lost and scared and alone. We do not need to suffer silently with crippling doubt anxiety and despair. We do not need to glorify suffering; we need to rectify it, recognize it, and ask for help from one another, from Creation and God. We are never left alone in our wilderness, God is

there, just as God is everywhere at all times and in all places. With angels waiting to serve us.

Let us keep our eyes open for angels, and they are the bearers of God's grace in our times of trial and weakness. They will lead the way out

of sin into righteousness, out of death into life, out of the wilderness to home.

Amen