

# FOUND IN THE Wilderness

## Facing Our Fear of... Powerlessness

March 12 | Rev. Dr. Tom Elson

### *Open in Prayer*

Invite the Holy Spirit into your gathering, giving God praise for your community and this journey of discovery and connection.

### *Gather - Where the Breath Begins*

Dry  
and dry  
and dry  
in each direction.  
Dust dry.  
Desert dry.  
Bone dry.  
And here  
in your own heart:  
dry,  
the center of your chest  
a bare valley  
stretching out  
every way you turn.  
Did you think  
this was where  
you had come to die?  
It's true that  
you may need  
to do some crumbling,  
yes.

That some things  
you have protected  
may want to be  
laid bare,  
yes.  
That you will be asked  
to let go  
and let go,  
yes.  
But listen.  
This is what  
a desert is for.  
If you have come here  
desolate,  
if you have come here  
deflated,  
then thank your lucky stars  
the desert is where  
you have landed—  
here where it is hard  
to hide,

here where it is unwise  
to rely on your own devices,  
here where you will  
have to look  
and look again  
and look close  
to find what refreshment waits  
to reveal itself to you.

I tell you,  
though it may be hard  
to see it now,  
this is where  
your greatest blessing  
will find you.

Il tell you,  
this is where  
you will receive  
your life again.

I tell you,  
this is where  
the breath begins.

—Jan Richardson  
from *Circle of Grace*

### *Listen, Converse, Imagine*

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil.<sup>2</sup> He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward 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 glory, <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> Then 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.

## *Respond*

1. What is the physical and/or metaphorical wilderness in this text?
2. What does Jesus’ experience in the wilderness teach us about the wilderness?
3. How does the wilderness shape those who journey through it? How does knowing/ believing that you are beloved shape your experience in the wilderness?
4. Where are you experiencing the fear being powerless? How are you (are you?) experiencing God’s presence in this wilderness place?

## *Reflect*

What commitment do you want to make or action do you want to take after listening to the message and reflecting with your group?

## *Pray*

Allow ample time to not only hear from one another how we can hold each other in our prayers during the coming week but also to pray together for God’s grace to flow over each concern.

# FOUND IN THE Wilderness

# Facing Our Fear of... Being Invisible

March 5 | Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell

## *Open in Prayer*

Invite the Holy Spirit into your gathering, giving God praise for your community and this journey of discovery and connection.

## *Gather - A Blessing As You Go*

If you would enter  
into the wilderness,  
do not begin  
without a blessing.

Do not leave  
without hearing  
who you are:  
Beloved,  
named by the One  
who has traveled this path  
before you.

Do not go  
without letting it echo  
in your ears,  
and if you find  
it is hard  
to let it into your heart,  
do not despair.  
That is what  
this journey is for.  
I cannot promise  
this blessing will free you  
from danger,  
from fear,  
from hunger  
or thirst, from the scorching  
of sun or the fall  
of the night.

But I can tell you  
that on this path  
there will be help.  
I can tell you  
that on this way  
there will be rest.  
I can tell you  
that you will know  
the strange graces  
that come to our aid  
only on a road  
such as this,  
Jan Richardson,  
*Circle of Grace*

## *Listen, Converse, Imagine*

Mark 5:25-34

<sup>25</sup> Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years. <sup>26</sup> She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had, and she was no better but rather grew worse.

<sup>27</sup> She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup> for she said, "If I but touch his cloak, I will be made well." <sup>29</sup> Immediately her flow of blood stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. <sup>30</sup> Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him,

Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my cloak?" <sup>31</sup> And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" <sup>32</sup> He looked all around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup> But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

## *Respond*

1. What is the physical and/or metaphorical wilderness in this text?
2. What does this woman's story teach us about the wilderness?
3. How does the wilderness shape those who journey through it? How does knowing/ believing that you are beloved shape your experience in the wilderness?
4. Where are you experiencing the fear being invisible? How are you (are you?) experiencing God's presence in this wilderness place?

## *Reflect*

What commitment do you want to make or action do you want to take after listening to the message and reflecting with your group?

## *Pray*

Allow ample time to not only hear from one another how we can hold each other in our prayers during the coming week but also to pray together for God's grace to flow over each concern.

# FOUND IN THE *Wilderness*

Facing Our Fear of...  
*the Unknown*

February 26 | Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell

## *Open in Prayer*

Invite the Holy Spirit into your gathering, giving God praise for your community and this journey of discovery and connection.

## *Gather*

Isolated and abandoned. Hungry and thirsty. Vulnerable and alone.

Most of us spend our entire lives avoiding these very things. Instead, we surround ourselves with people, stock our refrigerators, and make sure we are always in the know. And yet, it is these uncomfortable experiences that are trademarks of the hallowed space we know in Scripture and in life as the wilderness.

While the concept of wilderness often evokes images of desert plains and physical suffering, it can also be found in the busiest of cities and endured within our minds and souls. No matter where or how we enter into this desolate place, there is no denying the fact that the wilderness has the strange and sacred power of drawing us closer to God and encountering the divine in ways we never would have expected.

So this Lent, instead of avoiding the divine desert, we are going to embrace it. We are going to trace the dusty steps of those who walked in the desert, those who hid in the mountains, those who felt invisible.

And in those painful and scary places, we are going to trust that while we may feel lost and alone, God will find us wherever we might be.

## *Listen, Converse, Imagine*

Genesis 32:22-31

<sup>22</sup> That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup> After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. <sup>24</sup> So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. <sup>25</sup> When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. <sup>26</sup> Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."  
<sup>27</sup> The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

<sup>28</sup> Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

<sup>29</sup> Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

<sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

<sup>31</sup> The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

## *Respond*

1. What is the physical or metaphorical wilderness in this text?
2. What does this Scripture teach us about the wilderness?
3. How does the wilderness shape those who journey through it?
4. Where are you experiencing the fear of the unknown? How are you (are you?) experiencing God's presence in this wilderness place?

## *Reflect*

What commitment do you want to make or action do you want to take after listening to the message and reflecting with your group?

## *Pray*

Allow ample time to not only hear from one another how we can hold each other in our prayers during the coming week but also to pray together for God's grace to flow over each concern.

# Community Group Covenant - Lent 2023

As we begin this Lenten community group experience, we do so with the desire to pause before God to listen to and deepen our life with God and one another. To create a safe space to nurture this growth, we hold the following values as essential to our life together in this season.

## PARTICIPATION | ENGAGING WITH OTHERS

We agree to be mutual stewards of the life of our group, prioritizing our weekly gatherings and inviting every group members' participation, as they feel comfortable. We will be aware of group participation dynamics. If I am someone who tends to be a listener in group settings, I will consider leaning in to share my insights, perspectives, or questions. If I am someone who tends to talk a lot, I will consider practicing moderation to create space and time for others.

## CURIOSITY | YES AND

We agree to respect and be open to engaging others' perspectives, even when we disagree, through a posture of curiosity. An open heart and mind, expressed through the language of "Yes And" allows us to be "both/and" rather than "either/or". Our goal is to learn with and from each other, remaining and keeps us inclusive and compassionate toward everything.

## ATTENTIVE LISTENING | TO ONE ANOTHER, AND TO GOD

We agree to respect and demonstrate loving care for one another by practicing attentive listening, paying full attention to the one speaking, without interruption, and refraining from talking over others, and giving advice. Brief moments of silence are honored as space to think before speaking.

## CARE | "OOPS" AND "OUCH"

We agree, in all of our conversations, to trust that everyone is doing their best. We assume positive intent in others while also acknowledging potentially negative impact. Anyone can say "ouch" if hurt or offended to stop the process from continuing and explore what's happening and why. Anyone can say "oops" to acknowledge their assumptions and/or to respond to another's "ouch."

## CONFIDENTIALITY | CREATING SAFE SPACE

We commit to hold in confidence the personal stories, concerns, and reflections, and requests for prayer shared in our community. Our bond of trust is essential to creating space for God's good work in each of us to take place.

## NORMS

We agree to meet on \_\_\_\_\_(day of week) from \_\_\_\_\_(am/pm) to \_\_\_\_\_(am/pm) for six weeks, beginning Feb/March \_\_\_\_ and concluding April \_\_\_\_ .

We agree to discuss how our group can serve during Lent through

- Praying for our Mission Partners
- Other opportunities to serve (Do Justice Day of Service)\_