Benediction: Gracious God, help me to spend the necessary time in the wilderness, struggling with all the demons and metaphorical wild beasts within me so that they can be replaced and conquered with your goodness.

Amen

Jesus was baptized and received assurance of His identity as the Son of God. Then He immediately spent 40 days in the wilderness, listening to God and wrestling with all the temptations to go his own way instead of God’s, all those things inside Him that might prevent Him from fulfilling all that God called Him to do. He spent time in the wilderness listening to God and working to make the call of God the voice He heard most loudly in his heart.

Although we are mortals and not the holy, only begotten Son of God, we also have received assurance of our identity as Christ’s own in baptism. But living into our identity means struggle, it means conflict. [[1]](#endnote-1) Those of us who remember being teens struggling to find our identity as adults or those of us raising teens know this. Becoming fully mature people is hard. Becoming a fully mature Christian, living completely into the identity Jesus has for us is hard as well. The grace of Christianity is that God gives us His love freely. The challenge of Christianity is that God calls us to serve, to be disciples and to do this we need to be transformed. Transformation is difficult because we struggle with our own nature against the nature God would like us to take up.

For most of us that’s where the wilderness comes in. The wilderness is a place of preparation: a place of overcoming temptation; a place that God often leads us to.[[2]](#endnote-2) We need to spend time in the wilderness to let go of those things within ourselves that shut out Jesus. These are tendencies to take shortcuts when loving others, to overspend or overconsume, to think we aren’t good enough for a ministry to which we’re being called, to hold grudges against others, to neglect our time in prayer and worship with God.

For each of us, Lent offers the challenge and opportunity to spend 40 days in the wilderness wrestling with all those things inside us that prevent us from fulfilling all that God calls us to do and be, 40 days listening to God and working to make the voice of God the primary one we hear and follow within ourselves.

Now, most of us can’t go off and physically spend 40 days in the desert. We have jobs and families that we tend to. But, there are still ways in which we can have a wilderness experience in Lent. One way is to take a more manageable size retreat – a week, a weekend, or a day. Perhaps some of us might go camping or to a retreat center by ourselves or with a spiritual friend. Perhaps we seek the help of a spiritual director to plan the retreat or perhaps we just take our Bible and a few books of reflection that are meaningful to us. Perhaps we take our journal or our art supplies.

Another way we might do this is through mini-retreats throughout Lent. The Pray as you Go App has weekly 16-minute retreats based upon the wilderness experience. Print books also offer miniretreat like meditations and experiences.

We might also have a wilderness-like experience by limiting “noise” that blocks our hearing the voice of God. Perhaps we have quiet in the car instead of the radio or we watch less TV or we limit our exposure to social media. We fill this time with contemplation or with praying one or more of the prayers services each day that we find in the Book of Common Prayer or another spiritual book.

A Cherokee legend about the Two Wolves illustrates the concept of struggle in the wilderness and the importance of limiting noise, negativity and temptations and instead listening to the voice of God and feeding on the hope that is in Christ. In the legend:

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. “A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy. “It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.” He continued, “The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

This Lent I invite us to spend some time in the wilderness, wrestling with these wolves and then praying and trusting in God to help you to give spiritual nourishment to the good one.

Amen

1. Williamson, L. (1983). *Mark* (p. 36). Atlanta, GA: J. Knox Press [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “Lent 2018 Into the Wilderness,” Pray As You Go App, Jesuit Media Initiatives, London UK. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The Legend of Two Wolves found on Virtues for Life, https://www.virtuesforlife.com/two-wolves/ [↑](#endnote-ref-3)