

"MUSIC" by Anne Porter (from [Living Things: Collected Poems](#))

*When I was a child
I once sat sobbing on the floor
Beside my mother's piano
As she played and sang
For there was in her singing
A shy yet solemn glory
My smallness could not hold*

*And when I was asked
Why I was crying
I had no words for it
I only shook my head
And went on crying*

*Why is it that music
At its most beautiful
Opens a wound in us
An ache a desolation
Deep as a homesickness
For some far-off
And half-forgotten country*

*I've never understood
Why this is so*

*But there's an ancient legend
From the other side of the world
That gives away the secret
Of this mysterious sorrow
For centuries on centuries
We have been wandering
But we were made for Paradise
As deer for the forest*

*And when music comes to us
With its heavenly beauty
It brings us desolation
For when we hear it
We half remember
That lost native country*

*We dimly remember the fields
Their fragrant windswept clover
The birdsongs in the orchards
The wild white violets in the moss
By the transparent streams*

*And shining at the heart of it
Is the longed-for beauty
Of the One who waits for us*

*Who will always wait for us
In those radiant meadows*

*Yet also came to live with us
And wanders where we wander.*

On this first Sunday of Lent, we, along with the Psalmist, are waiting. Waiting on God to lift us up. Waiting on God to let us know what's important in our lives. Waiting to awaken to the Spirit of God within each of us to remind us of who we are and who's got our back.

With Jesus, we wend our way into the wilderness, where we will wait and, perhaps, be tempted by the things of this world and the evils that surround us into denying our true heritage. In this time of Lent, we are asked to go within, to seek deeper, and, yes, to wait, that our strength will be renewed and our "wings" of faith, patience and endurance grow strong enough to take us through the rest of our journey.

In our gospel account for today, Jesus, as is characteristic of his biographer, Mark, heads

immediately from his baptism into the wilderness where he will wander and wait for forty days and forty nights that His Abba who birthed Him, chose Him and marked Him with Love can prepare Him for the most challenging journey of his brief human life.

The Message has Jesus being “pushed” out into the wild by that same Spirit that descended from heaven, looking like a dove and declared divine with a voice from above.

When the call comes, look out. The next step is often a steep one and leads us into a place of wandering, temptation and oft times spiritual or even physical starvation.

I was extremely present to our theme this week as I realized how many people right here in our own Church Family are experiencing desert times in their lives in this moment. Struggling with pain and the fear of loss, many know right now what it is to struggle from moment to moment not knowing what the future holds or whether the pain and the sorrow will ever cease.

Here is the wound, the ache, the desolation Anne Porter so vividly describes in her poem I read at the beginning of these explorations. This is the place music often has a way of opening up for us and laying bare that which is affecting us at our deepest level.

And we wonder as we wander: Why is this happening to me? Why have I been pushed into this wilderness place, this time of desolation and deprivation? And it's so tempting to think that God "DID" this to us. Those of us of a certain age will remember Bea Arthur's character Maude's famous line, "God will get you for this, Arthur," as if God were a vengeful presence hovering around to slap the big karmic debt across the face of her husband.

But I don't believe that's what these wilderness wanderings are all about in our lives. I think they are opportunities for us to awaken to the truth of our lives. They are there for us to wrestle with the big questions we have about why we're here and what we believe. They are also times for us to wait and to listen and to find

new ways to be embraced by the One who corrects the misdirected, and sends us in the right direction. The One who gives the rejects a hand and leads us step-by-step.

“We rarely volunteer to go to wilderness places,” Dr. David Lose writes in his essay on this passage this week. “We don’t often LOOK for opportunities to struggle... Even when the challenges in front of us are of our own making – let alone those put upon us by others or the fortunes of life – we rarely want or actively seek such hardship. But can we possibly imagine that the Spirit might make use of us during these challenges?”

“I am not suggesting that God causes us misery or suffering,” he goes on to say, “[or] to teach us something, and definitely not to punish us or put us in our place...I don’t believe that God even wants us to suffer, let alone causes us to. But I do wonder if we can imagine that perhaps God is at work both for us and through us during our wilderness times... I wonder if we can look at the struggles around us in light of

this story and ask, 'Even though I did not wish for this, how might God be at work through this difficult period. What can I get out of this? How might God use me to help someone else?' These kinds of questions aren't meant so much to redeem struggle and suffering – as if that's our job! – but rather to remind us of God's presence during those wilderness times that leave us feeling stretched beyond our abilities."

And this is why our Psalm for today is so perfectly paired with this journey Jesus takes through the wilderness. "Show me how you work, God; School me in your ways. Take me by the hand; Lead me down the path of truth."

"Wilderness experiences come in all forms today," our Seasons of the Spirit curriculum noted this week. "Sometimes we seek them out intentionally. Other times we simply find ourselves in a "wilderness" as a result of some natural disaster, or some personal upheaval, crisis, or trauma. What experiences have you had with natural wildernesses? What experiences of spiritual or emotional wilderness

have you had? What's your best personal resource for coping with wilderness?"

I thought today would be a good day to do something we haven't done for a while. That is to take some time for a little self-reflection right here in our service as we continue together on this Lenten road.

If you were here Wednesday, you were given an opportunity to write down something you wanted to confess or offer up to God at the beginning of these 40 days and 40 nights of wilderness wandering. Those confessions were then taken to be burned as a symbol of our souls' offerings being given and dedicated to God's enduring care.

Today, I'd like us to continue what our Season of the Spirit calls a "Soul Journey" which we will explore together throughout these Six Sundays of Lent. Each week will feature a different destination as a way to help us discern God's voice and call in our lives.

So let's get started for today. Please take one of those trusty little pieces of paper and those not-so-trustworthy pens in the pew in front of you or use your bulletin or whatever you want, and let's take a little time to consider these questions for today as we journey to the Water.

Close your eyes for a moment and journey within to a lake, a pond, an ocean or a river – whatever image comes up for you, go with it.

Breathe deeply as you encounter this body of water and let its essence wash over you.

(silence)

In this soul space, I invite you to ponder a few questions and then write down whatever comes to you. Don't worry if nothing comes to you in this moment, but take these questions with you if you like and see if anything comes to you throughout the week.

First, How does God speak to my heart?

Second, What might God have to say about this place?

And last, How might this relate to other areas of my life: □ **my** work, my family, myself?

Even though we're by the water, we continue to wander in the wilderness seeking God's comfort, God's guidance and how we can co-create with our Creator.

"Like water, the wilderness has a deep ambivalence, theologian Lawrence Moore writes. "It is the place of deliverance, where Yahweh takes the liberated Hebrew slaves and makes them into a people. It is traditionally the place where God is to be found... It was the place where prophets went to commune with God and where refugees went for safety. It is the place where John is baptising – the Jordan wilderness near Jerusalem. And now Jesus is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness... Jesus' proving ground... the struggle to live out his calling faithfully is one that has to be lived out and "proved" in the faithful doing of it... The way of faith requires learning and putting into practice."

A Prayer for Illumination for Lent

by Jamie Norwich McLennan

God of covenants,

We often move through our deserts and
wildernesses unchanged.

Today let us hear your words

in scripture and song

so that they move us

and change us.

May we come from our time of worship

with the same fire and passion

that burned in the life of Jesus

as He came out of His wilderness. Amen.