

Wilderness

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

For thousands of years, indigenous people have walked on this land, in their own country.

Caring for the land is at the centre of their lives.

With respect and gratitude we acknowledge the Darug people and their stewardship of this land throughout the ages.

SONG: 'O Holy One'

CALL TO WORSHIP FOR A DISPERSED PEOPLE [written by Craig Mitchell]

We are connected by God's Spirit, hoping for a glimpse of the holy:
the One who brooded over Creation
who engulfed a bush in flame
who made a path through the waters
who rolled away the tombstone

We are connected by God's Spirit, hoping for a whisper of the truth:

the Word who first spoke in the silence
the voice who raged with prophet's zeal
the host who sang of peace on earth
the teacher who blessed humble and poor

We are connected by God's Spirit, hoping for a touch of compassion:

the tenderness that shaped the human body
the caress that opened eyes of the blind
the soothing hand that brought healing calm
the warmth that embraced lonely and lost

We are connected by God's Spirit, in the presence of mystery:

of One who is
revealed and hidden,
known and unknown
mother and father of Creation
human God-with-us
living Word

eternal Spirit
 Three and One
 Breathe into us
 hope, faith and joy
Breathe into us
compassion, truth and holiness
Breathe into us
reconciliation, justice and peace
Breathe newness of life
as we worship today
in this place and in many places
joined by your Spirit of comfort and hope. Amen

LENTEN CANDLE MEDITATION:

[You might like to light a few candles at this point]

It's Sunday morning - And we find ourselves in a wilderness space we had not expected. Over the coming weeks we will be learning how to be the church without being in the church building. We will learn how to remain connected, life-giving, life-transforming community during this time of physical separation. But for now I invite you to close your eyes and be in the moment...

No matter where you are in your thoughts and feelings— I encourage you to set all that aside and consider this sacred moment....imagine the great cloud of witnesses that holds us and connects each of us to the other, across all time and all distance... reach out with your heart...sense this precious connection...listen... for God is present. God meets you where you are and calls you forward, moment by moment, guiding you slowly but surely toward transformation.

[Silent time]

As we extinguish this light, we acknowledge the grief and pain of our separation.

[A candle may be extinguished.]

Let us pray:

Loving God, we thank you that you are with us, and that we may call upon you no matter where we are, or what we are feeling. Keep us mindful of your presence and trusting in your promise—that you are working with us in the moment-by-moment unfolding of our lives. In your many names we pray. Amen.

SONG: 'Oh Tender God of Mercy'

PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

Jesus of Nazareth,
 There are stories of you healing the blind all over scripture.
 You were constantly opening people's eyes.
 So today we confess that we often choose to keep our eyes closed.
 We turn away from injustice in our world, worried you might ask us to work for change. We close our eyes to our privilege, because the truth is uncomfortable.

We avoid eye contact with those who are suffering to avoid identifying with their pain. Forgive us for failing to be your Church in the world. Guide us from the depths of our wilderness into your light. Amen.

SONG: 'Open Unto Me'

WILDERNESS POEM: THE WILDERNESS IS A PLACE OF DISRUPTION

[written by Sarah Are, adapted by Ellie]

My grandfather was a good man,
But he believed that wilderness emotions
were not to be seen.

Cry with the door closed,
Don't dwell on the negative.
Chin up, kid,
We've been here before.

My grandfather was a good man,
But I'd like to say—
The wilderness is here to interrupt your
previously-scheduled programming.
Like water in the desert
And setting the slaves free,
The wilderness might be
The very thing we need,
The very thing we dream,
The very thing we plead for.

I guess what I'm trying to say is—
It never seems appealing to let a bird
in the house,
But if you do,
Then you might as well
Open every window and door.
And if you do,
Then you just might find yourself
Basking in the light,
Dancing in the breeze,
Overwhelmed with the beauty
That an open door brings.

So I'm opening my door
And inviting in the wind,
To rustle up my heart
And start over again.
For sweeping the truth under the rug
Has never gotten us far.
So may the wilderness be like a
Bird in your house.
Throw open your doors.
The truth must come out.

SONG: 'In My Heart is the Road'

FIRST READING: Psalm 23

SONG: 'You are Slow'

GOSPLE READINGS: John 9:1-41

MEDITATION: [written by Craig Mitchell]

[If leading this mediation at home for others, invite them to close their eyes, and become aware of slowing their breathing. A * indicates a pauses]

The day is hot and dusty. You are sitting in a familiar place in the market. *

The smell of over-ripe food and sweaty animals is not new to you, nor are the flies that swarm about your face. *

The air is filled with voices - local merchants soliciting passing customers, the gossip of elderly folk, the laughter of children. *

You sit alone in silence with a hand outstretched, begging for small change from faceless figures in the crowd. *

You have been blind since birth, and cannot imagine the kaleidoscope of colour which surrounds you. The world of sounds and smells is familiar to you, yet lacking something you cannot name. *

Blindness has brought you solitude. Distanced from the hustle and bustle of the marketplace, there is much time to think.

What feelings surface as you reflect on your life as a blind beggar?

What longings do you feel?

What thoughts do you have as you contemplate your past and future? *

You hear approaching voices engaged in earnest discussion. A few men and women, maybe six in number. *

As you stretch out your hand, more out of habit than hope, the voices stop in front of you. *

What is happening? Sometimes a coin is thrown in your direction, sometimes a kick, but no-one ever pauses for an instant. You cringe, expecting to be struck or spat upon. *

A woman speaks. "Teacher, whose sin caused this person to be born blind? Was it their own or their parents' sin?" What strange words? How do they make you feel? *

A man replies. His rich voice sends a shiver down your spine. Although young he speaks with father-like gentleness and authority. "This person's blindness has nothing to do with their sins or their parents' sins. This person is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in them. I am the light that this person needs, that the world needs." *

What an astonishing statement? How do you react? Is it with wonder or fear? *

"God's power might work in me". What hopes arise in you? *

Impulsively you reach out your hand towards this voice. A warm hand grips yours. You are startled. No-one has ever touched you like this, but the firm and friendly grip brings its own reassurance. *

You hear the man spit, although now you do not flinch. He releases his grip and places a hand under your chin. *

You feel his gentle fingers, damp with water and mud, caress your eyelids. *

A warmth flows through his hands, a strength, a mysterious power. *

As this person speaks to you, you remember the name you heard - Jesus. "Go and wash your face in the pool" he says. What does he mean? What has he done? *

Hands grab and propel you towards the nearby pool. You fall shaking to your knees, and thrust your hands into the cool water. *

You splash the refreshing liquid on your face, and peer through the caked mud. A flash! Something stabs your mind, dim and getting brighter. Movement, shapes, colour! * Glistening water, and a reflection in the pool of a stunned face - your face!

"I can see! I can see!" A miracle! *

You turn around, overwhelmed by joy and gratitude.

Share with Jesus your feelings at this time. *

Now imagine yourself going home to the family who have cast you out to beg. What is their reaction? What happens next in your life? *

Bring your meditation time to a close, and gradually return yourself to the present.

SONG: 'Hidden with Christ'

OFFERING:

Even when we are separated from one another and from our usual practice of worship, we need to continue to support the life of our church. If you are not already part of 'Giving Direct' please consider doing this or you can transfer online or at a Westpac branch by depositing into the St Andrews account at Uniting Financial Services

BSB 634 634 ACC:100030278

or post a cheque to St Andrews Uniting Church Glenbrook

PO Box 54, Glenbrook 2773.

SONG: 'With Grateful Joy'

For all we receive and all we give, we are grateful.

Whether we are giving or receiving, we belong to Christ.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Let us pray in silence for our world, our country, our community, our church, for the vulnerable who are close to us, for ourselves....

[silent prayer]

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world

different than it is.
 Sing. Pray. Touch only those
 to whom you commit your life.
 Centre down.
 And when your body has become still,
 reach out with your heart.
 Know that we are connected
 in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
 Know that our lives
 are in one another's hands.

Do not reach out your hands.
 Reach out your heart.
 Reach out your words.
 Reach out all the tendrils
 of compassion that move, invisibly,
 where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love--
 for better or for worse,
 in sickness and in health,
 so long as we all shall live.
 [Written by Lynn Ungar]

SONG: 'Hear my cry, O God.'

BLESSING
 Crucified and Risen One,
 You have chosen us and we have chosen you
 May this way of choosing become a way
 of knowing, loving and living
 that knows no end
 Amen.

Song: 'Holy One, Now Let your Servants go in peace'