



Wilder + ness “state of the wild”

Lent begins in the wilderness. The Spirit guides Jesus into the wilderness where he comes face to face with temptation and struggle. Yet, in his forty days of fasting, resisting, and wandering, Jesus is shaped and formed for ministry. Similarly, through the wilderness of Lent, we are invited to surrender to the wild leadings of the Spirit. We rarely enter the wilderness willingly, but hopefully through our wandering we remember who we are and whose we are. The wilderness can become sacred even if it remains dangerous. There is no wilderness space too harsh or threatening for God’s love. Welcome to the wilderness journey.

1st SUNDAY IN LENT March 1, 2020

Much of who we are is shaped by the wilderness. Made in the image of God, Adam and Eve discover how easy it is to get stuck in human brokenness. Jesus finds his sense of call in the wilderness, as his ministry becomes defined by what he resists: hunger (feeding the hungry), and power (finding power in servanthood).

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 (NRSV)

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

³ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,^[a] knowing good and evil.” ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Footnotes:

- a. Genesis 3:5 Or *gods*

Matthew 4:1-11 (NRSV)

⁴ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴ But he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes
from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ 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.’”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him,

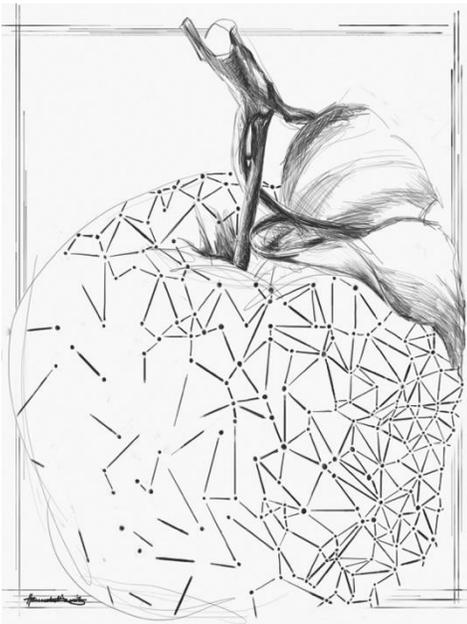
“Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Guiding Questions

- *What is the physical or metaphorical wilderness in these texts?*
- *What does this scripture teach us about wilderness?*
- *How does the wilderness shape those who journey through it?*
- *Where is God in the wilderness?*



SYNAPSES by Hannah Garrity

Inspired by Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 | Graphic Image

Artist Statement: In this art piece, I imagined an apple, like the one on a teacher's desk. The apple itself breaks the border of its frame like the knowledge of good and evil broke the barriers set by God. Within the apple, synapses get more and more dense as the eye moves to the right.

When my son was little I remember seeing a searing image on a poster at a doctor's office. There were a few brain scans. One was of an infant at birth. Then there were a couple of scans of brains that were a few months old. The newborn's brain was spacious; the visual appeared to me like a blank canvas. The brains of the babies that were older showed a vast shift. One was significantly more full than the other. In my recollection, the poster was promoting talking and reading to your little ones. The fuller scans showed children who had been exposed to more words. Having taught school for many years, my reaction was visceral. We do not have much time, I thought.

As Adam and Eve began their journey into the world, away from Eden, I imagine that their brains continued to fill with connections, building knowledge. Does the knowledge of good and evil subject us to social vulnerabilities like judgement, ridicule, intimidation? Does our awareness of good and evil set us up for divisiveness? We cannot strive for less awareness. Like Adam and Eve, we innately year for more. In this age of constant information flow, our temptation to read only what we agree with looms like the forbidden fruit in Eden. Serpents are lurking. Yet the truth is discernible. We all know good from evil.



SPIRIT LED by Lauren Wright Pittman

Inspired by Matthew 4:1-11 | Graphic Image

Artist Statement: I depicted Jesus divided, containing in his divinity all the stars and galaxies of the universe on the left, and the layered dust of his humanity on the right. For me, this text highlights the tension held within Jesus' identity, particularly through the tempter's efforts to lead Jesus toward his human nature while betraying his divinity. If Jesus were to succumb to the tempter's requests, he would have access to the unlimited power, influence, and riches the world has to offer, which are referenced by the stacked, columned structures on the right side of the image. If Jesus chooses to resist the temptations and stay planted in the wilderness, honoring his divinity and call, he chooses the wilderness path—one that would ultimately lead to his demise.

Jesus' ministry is defined by this standoff with the tempter. He is asked to turn stones into bread; instead he goes on to share meals with those deemed unworthy, and miraculously shares two loaves of bread with five thousand people. He is asked to stand on the pinnacle of the church and enlist the help of angels; instead he goes on to turn over tables protesting the temple's entanglement with capitalism and greed. He is asked to take his place as earthly ruler over all; instead he will take the shape of a servant, dying a state-sanctioned death.

Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness immediately after being baptized. The wilderness has something to offer Jesus, and instead of taking a detour around it, he chooses to encounter its lessons. When we find ourselves in the wilderness places of life, may we take an open, curious posture, ready to be challenged, shaped, and sent.

Wilderness

...is a place of beginnings

...teaches us who—and whose—we are

...tests our strength and faith

...shapes our identity and our call

...is a place to risk failure and getting it wrong

...can be isolating and dangerous

...but also, a place to meet God.