



LAKE OF BAYS PASTORAL CHARGE

Pioneer, Hillside – 10:30 a.m.

**Sunday Worship, February 18, 2024
First Sunday in Lent**

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04/05/2024

WE GATHER

Welcome, Life and Work of the Church

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Acknowledgement of the Land

As we begin our worship here in Lake Bays Township we acknowledge the ancient indigenous history and heritage of the land upon which we live and worship and work. We acknowledge the many original indigenous people of this land with all their different languages and cultures — the First Nations people, the Metis people and the Inuit people. We are aware of the terrible inhumanity and injustice with which our ancestors treated indigenous people in the past and we are deeply sorry for the way these injustices continue today. In Black History Month we also acknowledge those whose ancestors were indigenous to the continent of Africa and came here under the violent system of slavery and white supremacy. As followers of Jesus Christ, with deep humility, we seek healing and work towards right relations among all those who live in this land.

INTROIT: O God We Call VU#411

O God we call

O God we call

From deep inside we yearn

From deep inside we yearn

From deep inside we yearn for you.

Call to Worship:

The Lenten journey has begun.

Lent's questions confront us.

Where will the road take us?

What kind of people will we be?

Will we have the courage to withstand temptation?

Will we trust in God's faithfulness as we travel through the wilderness?

The quest will test us and try us.

We come trusting that Jesus will be our guide.

Opening Hymn: Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery VU121

Tree of life and awesome mystery,
In your death we are reborn,
Though you die in all of history,
still you rise with every morn,
Still you rise with every morn.

Seed that dies to rise in glory,
May we see ourselves in you,
If we learn to live your story,
We may die to rise anew,
we may die to rise anew.

We remember truth one spoken,
love passed on through act and word,
Every person, lost and broken
wears the body of our Lord,
wears the body of our Lord.

Gentle Jesus, mighty Spirit,
come inflame our hearts anew,
We may all your joy inherit,
if we bear the cross with you,
if we bear the cross with you.

Christ you lead and we shall follow,
stumbling though our steps may be,
One with you in joy and sorrow,
we the river you the sea,
we the river you the sea

Prayer of Approach (unison)

God of the wild places

**We experience your call compelling us to join the Lenten journey
with people around the world**

We hear your voice inviting us into the wilderness

Stay with us as we face our own demons.

Stay with us as we listen for your voice.

Stay with us as we seek to live our lives in Your Way Amen.

Paraphrase of the Prayer of Jesus VU#916

Eternal Spirit,

Earth-maker,

Pain Bearer,

Life-Giver,

Source of all that is and that shall be.

Father and Mother of us all,

Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by peoples of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

**Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope
and come on earth. With the bread we need for today, feed us.**

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

**For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and
forever. Amen.**

WE LISTEN and RESPOND

Scripture reading: Mark 1:9-15

Leader: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Response: Thanks be to God

Hymn for Reflection: Soil of God You and I MV#174

1. Soil of God, you and I, stand ready to bear seeds of faith nourished by God's tender care. Growing in everyone for here God is found. All stand together, we are Holy ground.
2. Soil of God, you and I, now ready to be part of God's promise, for others to see. Open to everyone for here God is found. All stand together, we are Holy ground.
3. Soil of God, you and I, now called to rebirth, joining as partners with all of the earth. Living in harmony for here God is found. All stand together, this is Holy ground.

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Sermon: In the Wild. (A sermon in progress)

Lent always begins with the story of Jesus in the Wilderness. Mark's gospel says that he was driven into the wilderness by the Spirit which he has just experienced in an extraordinarily powerful way at his baptism when he saw the heavens open and the Spirit descended upon him like a dove and he heard the voice of God called him "Beloved."

After hearing the word "Beloved" he knows this has everything to do with his mission and that he must thoroughly prepare himself for the work that God has called him to do. Knowing this, he is driven and compelled to go into the wilderness.

What exactly is wilderness?

Is it that something that most of us go in search of from time to time when we just have to go for a walk or go camping or when we escape to the cottage—a somewhat wild place, mostly untouched by human interference—a place that we try to protect from too much human interference—a place that is alive with a vitality that emanates from an original source—a liveliness that comes from a power and a creativity that is uncontrolled by humans and undiminished by human domination. This lively presence is everywhere and those that practice mindfulness and meditation can access that liveliness no matter where they are. But most of us find that we have to go away to get in touch with the presence that we seek and that we desire.

Wilderness as an actual place represents both an external and an inner reality. Human beings have a deep need for both and when this need is not satisfied it can become a craving that gets met in many harmful addictive ways. There is a wild place

within every human being that most of us have lost touch with—a wild place that is known only to ourselves and God—a wild place deep within that connects us to our original God-given belovedness and our original God-given purpose within the cosmos. (Rohr on Bonaventure)

In Jesus' day there was a lot more external wilderness than there is today and to prepare himself for his ministry, he needed the external wilderness to provide space for him to connect deeply with his internal wilderness—to become firmly grounded in this wild beloved place within himself.

Mark's gospel says that Jesus was driven into the wilderness immediately following his public baptism in the Jordan river. Why does Jesus, who according to church doctrine is not a sinner, need to be baptized at all? Biblical theologians agree that Jesus' embrace of John's baptism signifies a public act of commitment to the way of God that John has been preparing. There is a subtle difference, parts of which are lost in English translation, in the way Mark describes Jesus' baptism, in contrast to the others who have come to be baptized by John. Jesus is baptized "into" (Gk. *eis*, 1:9, not just "in," cf. 1:5) the Jordan, without any confession of sins. He perfectly embodies John's call to repent of the world's ways, repentance not only from the sins of the world, but from the whole sinful world. This kind of repentance amounts to nothing less than death. With his baptism, Jesus signals the end of his former life. He dies not only to sin, but to all of the assumptions, worldviews, entanglements, and obligations of his former life as a citizen of Galilee; in this public act he declares that he is no longer subordinate to the temple and the Jerusalem authorities, to Herod, or to Caesar and the Roman occupiers. His baptism is not only a religious act, but a political and economic assertion of God's lordship in his life. When he emerges from the waters of the Jordan River, Jesus thus becomes the first citizen of God's empire, completely free of obligations to anyone or anything but God and God's coming rule. He is now free to pursue God's call and empowered to do all the things that will define his ministry. This is made clear by Mark when, as soon as he arises from the Jordan Jesus sees the heavens themselves being torn apart. The image is both violent and hope-filled. The only other place Mark uses this word for ripping and tearing is in the description of the events that take place at the moment Jesus dies on the cross, when the veil of the temple is torn in two, from top to bottom. In both cases, God is doing the ripping. These are both high apocalyptic moments, when the boundaries between earth and heaven are disordered and dissolved. As the heavens are being torn apart, Jesus also sees the Spirit coming down from heaven, like a dove, not just upon him, but into him. This is the same Spirit of God that moved over the face of the waters of the deep at the creation of the world. The descent of the Spirit signals that God is now joining together with humanity to re-write the human story and bring about the kind of world that God has always in-

tended—a world founded and rooted in that word “beloved”—the Good News of God’s wild and wonderful and eternal love.

The story says that Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days which is a Hebrew way of saying “a very long time—” a very special long time within which significant transformations take place. During the time of Noah it rained on the earth for a long time.(40 days and 40 nights) During their escape from Egypt the Israelites were in the wilderness for a long time.(40 years) During the very early days of Christianity Jesus made appearances within the Christian community for 40 days before his ascension. The idiom of 40 days has become literal for us in the season of Lent when the church worldwide takes 40 days to figuratively walk with Jesus as he proclaims the dangerous Good News of God’s love

Dangerous good news? Why would good news about God’s unfailing love be dangerous.

We can be sure that Jesus was very aware that his message would be threatening to both the religious authorities and the political authorities. And he knew that in proclaiming this message, he would be risking his life. Much of his time in the wilderness most probably had to do with accepting that the probable cost of proclaiming God’s reign of loving empowerment, peace and justice for all would cost him his life. The message of God’s “Malkutah” or what we now call human rights— would cost him his life—as it has cost the lives of many others in our world. I’m sure Jesus was realistically preparing himself for the worst. I believe he was empowered by a very real hope that the world as he knew it could be and would be turned upside down and God’s Reign could become and would become a reality, but as MARK’s gospel makes very clear not too far into Jesus’ ministry—he began to realize that the worst was going to happen.

People were amazed by the authority with which Jesus taught after his wilderness experience. They were astounded at the powerful impact that his authority had. Crowds began to follow him wherever he went. This simple fact is a signal of how dangerous his message was to everyone who hears the story—to follow Jesus is to follow someone who had become a danger to the principalities and the powers. Crowds were strictly prohibited by the Roman empire, as they are now wherever power props itself up through violence and intimidation.

And why did Jesus' authority strike such fear into the hearts of the powerful—powers that recognized that the presence of this authority fresh from the wilderness-- would be the end of them- certainly the end of their domination and control—the end of their control over the lives of ordinary people.

In the wilderness Jesus was clearly struggled with what it would mean to be the embodiment of the Good News of God's Love—a message that would bring healing and hope and liberation to the masses. He went through forty wild and vulnerable days of training and preparation. Forty wild days of temptation by all the powers of the world that desire to dominate and control the human spirit and exercise power over others. Mark's gospel tells us that for survival and encouragement to root himself in the ground of a different kind of power—power with others—he had only the wild beasts and the angels for companionship.

I like to think that it was in the wilderness that Jesus began to pray the prayer that we now call the Lord's prayer and that morning and night he practised the proclamation of God's "Malkutah"—a realm in which the dominion which God gives to human being is "with, along with or along side of" the whole creation—a way of partnership that includes all.

"Malkutah" is the Aramiac word used by Jesus to speak of the Kingdom of God. When he prays "Your Kingdom Come" in the prayer he taught his disciples he would have used the Aramaic words "Teytey Malkutah" which can be rendered as "Empower us to say "I can." And help us to create the companionship of empowerment that will become Your Reign of Love in our world."

Along with all the temptations in the wilderness I imagine Jesus experiencing a deep embodied sense of being loved by the Love that is the birthright of every person and of which he received powerful assurance at his baptism. I imagine Jesus standing under the starlit sky with his arms stretched out taking in the fullness of the Love that was living through him

and everything around him—embracing a connection with his wild human capacity for God—and then...after wrestling with and overcoming the temptation to use these wild gifts and powers for evil and selfish purposes—Jesus began his ministry by calling others to join him in his vision of reconciliation and healing and wholeness-- a wilderness driven vision for all of creation that has yet to come into fullness.

Turn away I hear Jesus say today.

Turn away from all the voices of your upbringing that would have you believe that you are worthless and unclean and unacceptable. Turn towards the good news of God's love and believe it with all your heart and soul and mind and body. God's love is a wild and wonderful love that knows no bounds—an uncontrollable love that resists all the evil powers that would try to control and dominate you. God's love fills you up and surrounds you and assures you that you are precious and—not only that—you can be filled with the Spirit so that you too, like me, can be filled with power. So do not fear the principalities and the powers that make you feel helpless and small and powerless. God's love is more powerful even than death. So come. Join me. Connect with that wild God-given space within yourself that enables you to know that you are loved for who you are and because of this, you will know that every one we meet is loved in the very same way.

Brothers and Sisters, as we join Jesus in his pilgrimage towards Jerusalem during this Lenten season, may this vision become the ground out of which all our actions grow. Amen.

Tey Tey Malkutah. May it come fully— soon!

Offertory: We give You But Your Own VU#542

**We give you but your own,
whate'er the gift may be;
all that we have is yours alone,
we give it gratefully.**

Offertory/Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Closing Hymn: Like a Healing Stream MV#144

1 Like a healing stream in a barren desert,
Spirit water bringing life to dusty earth,
God is trickling through our lives
as in a dream unfolding,
promising revival and rebirth ... like a healing stream.

2 Like a gentle rain on a thirsty garden,
Spirit water comes to nourish tiny seed,
God is bubbling through the soil
to coax a new creation,
yearning for an end to want and need ... like a gentle rain.

3 Like a river strong with a restless current,
Spirit water rushing on to distant shore,
God is carving out a channel in a new direction,
calling for an end to hate and war ... like a river strong.

4 Like a mighty sea reaching far horizons,
Spirit water with a love both deep and wide,
God is working in our hearts to shape a new tomorrow:
God will always challenge and provide!
Like a mighty sea, like a river strong,
like a gentle rain, like a healing stream.

Commissioning and Benediction

Go forth into the world with good courage my friends

May the love of the Holy One

enfold you

May the labour of the Birthing One

deliver you

**May the wisdom of the Wild One
Sustain you
And May the peace of the All in One Sustain you
Bless you
And guide you home. Amen**