

Being Cast Into the Wilderness: Find a tree

Blessed be God who animates our lives and offers us living streams of consolation in our desolation and wilderness. AMEN

The Greek word for wilderness is eremos. It does not literally mean Wilderness but rather a place of loneliness and no habitation. Eremos wildernesses are seemingly lacking human survival resources, challenging, not popular or populated. wilderness is a place of desolation

Jesus was CAST into the wilderness which connotes that someone else or something else was operating upon him...The power of the Holy Spirit. Other words used for this power might be thrown, flung,

however, There is nothing to suggest that Jesus did not want to be so cast like a fishing line into water

Today as we are poised at the beginning of Lent we too might be willing to be flung by the Holy Spirit to spaces we previously dared not go. To at least confront or inhabit our own spaces of desolation or fear or chaos

this lent are we willing to be thrown into a wilderness? are we willing to surrender to the power God to teach accompany and transform in this experience?

What is promised in these holy wildernesses which seem to lack everything we are used to for survival is exactly everything we need for survival: the opportunity to know God for it is God who offers the water of grace, the water of baptism, streams of living water... STOP

That is how my sermon was to begin this day...and then I was going to go ahead and give you examples of the wildernesses of our lives such as grief, depression, poverty, tragic loss, dislocation, well you get the point

And then I was going to talk about transforming power of the Holy SPIRIT in these radical rough and stark places to help us know or glimpse God's healing, redeeming, saving and merciful power. The power of the Holy Spirit to transform desolation into consolation.

To move us from despair to wholeness, integration and wisdom.

I was going to offer that as the hope which inspires our Lenten wilderness practices. The hope which becomes clearer as we shed burdens and put on the armor of light.

I was going to remind us of the prayer of St Francis: make me an instrument of thy peace where there is doubt hope, where there is injury pardon

I was going to tell a story of St Cuthbert on the Island of Indisfarne who flung himself each morning into the wild icy rocky sea only to emerge unscathed and whole and as the legend has it, to be dried by the seals...

And then in the middle of my preparation and quite frankly pride about a neat and tidy sermon developing, Ash Wednesday happened

ashes were imposed between flowery sweet valentine wishes and then the too devastating news of another, could it possibly be? school shooting. We were all flung, unwillingly, into a wilderness of fear, chaos, anger and confusion not to mention hopelessness and helplessness

Facebook lit up (I soon turned it off) with agonizing solutions or despair or numbness
And what I noticed was that we had yet again in the face of tragedy lined ourselves up on one or the other side of the dichotomy of either/or
how could this be dichotomous how could we be divided
to pray OR to act...
to condemn or embrace
to judge or to have mercy

these are not either or moments...these are moments which demand the both andness of compassion

FEELING PASSIONATELY WITH even while suffering, even while hurting, even while despairing

there are no sufficient words...

and so I have thrown most of my sermon away and offer instead this poem by Teddy Macker

A friend gave it to me to guide me during lent
it has haunted me and i know of no better way to orient us this day and point us to God
It is titled a Poem to my Daughter but Ellie could be Eddie

It seems we have made pain
some kind of mistake,
like having it
is somehow wrong.

Don't let them fool you—
pain is a part of things.

But remember, dear Ellie,
the compost down in the field:
if the rank and dank and dark
are handled well, not merely discarded,
but turned and known and honored,
they one day come to beds of rich earth
home even to the most delicate rose.



God comes to you disguised as your life.

Being Cast Into the Wilderness: Find a tree

Blessings often arrive as trouble.

In French, the word *blessé* means to wound
and relates to the Old English *bletsian*—

to sprinkle with blood.

And in Sanskrit there is a phrase,
a phrase to carry with you
wherever you go:

sarvam annam:

everything is food.

Every last thing.



The Navajo people,
it is said,
intentionally wove
(intentionally!)
obvious flaws into their sacred quilts ...

Why?

It is there, they say,
in the “mistake,”
in the imperfection,

through which the Great Spirit moves.



Life is easy, yes.
And life is hard.
Life is simple, yes.
And life is complex.
We are tough, yes. But we are also fragile.
Everything's eternally perfect
but help out if you can.

Being Cast Into the Wilderness: Find a tree



Work on becoming a native of mind, a native of heart.
No thought, no feeling, could ever be “bad.”

It’s just another creature
in the bestiary of Buddha,
the bestiary of Christ.

Knowing this,
knowing this down to the marrow,
could save you, dear one,
much needless strife.

Remember that wild and strange animals
paused to drink at the pond
of the Buddha’s mind
even after he saw
the morning star.



No matter what you do, no matter what happens,
it is impossible to leave the path.

Let me say that one more time:
No matter what you do, no matter what happens,
it is impossible to leave the path.



Believe it or not, dear Ellie,
some folks carefully imagine
hideous gods tearing at flesh,
clawing at faces,
eating human hearts,
and drinking cups of blood ...

Why?

Being Cast Into the Wilderness: Find a tree

To shake hands with the Whole Catastrophe,
to cultivate the Noble Idiot Yes.

According to their tradition,
there are 84,000 "skillful means,"
84,000 tactics of wakefulness,
84,000 ways to become spaciouly alive,
84,000 ways to be at home in your life and in this world.

And many of those skillful means are like this one:

enlightenment through endarkment.



Life appears to be fundamentally ambiguous.

Wily, everycolored, unpindownable.

For evidence of this, spend time with trees.

Over and over they say,

There is no final word.

And big decisions—
decisions concerning
relationships, concerning children,
concerning death—
are rarely made cleanly.

In general, be wary—
even if just a little—
of talk of purity,
of goodness,
of light.



To love everything, not just parts ...
To love all of yourself, not just certain traits ...

Being Cast Into the Wilderness: Find a tree

To rest in not knowing ...

To carry the cross
and to lay your burden down ...

To savor the medicine blue of moon,
the fierce sugar of tangerine ...

To be a Christ unto others,
a Christ unto one's self ...

To laugh ...

To be shameless, wild, and silly ...

To know—fully, headlong,
without compunction—the ordinary magic
of our beautiful human bodies ...

these seem worthwhile pursuits, life-long tasks.



By way of valediction, dear Ellie,
I pass along some words
from our many gracious teachers:

Eden is.

The imperfect is our paradise.

All is grace.

(SILENCE)

so then i knew all is grace, eden is, the wilderness is our paradise...
and it is impossible...impossible...to leave the path

God is in the wilderness
God is the wilderness
Our task is not to escape to get out of the wilderness

Being Cast Into the Wilderness: Find a tree

It is to pass through, to live into it

I have to believe especially today, especially this Lent, that we are being called into our most desolate and desparate wilderness yet and that Christ will redeem it

I have to believe that we are called to witness and to partner with Christ in this redemption

I have to believe that hope the hope of the Gospel and the joy of the Resurrection are the end of the story

I have to believe that like manna from heaven living water will be revealed in the wilderness

we dear people of God have work to do

we must engage in prayerful action

we must go into the wilderness of our greatest fears and offer them up to God that they are transformed in the Paschal Mystery into hope actionable hope

the hope of the Noah story is that in making a covenant yet again with God's created beings previously unimaginable partnerships are being forged

God created beauty and goodness out of chaos and void once

God can do it again

Please help God in bringing about the beloved community with this

A Franciscan Benediction

May God bless you with discomfort

At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships

So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger

At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,

So that you may work for justice freedom and peace

May God bless you with tears

To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war,

So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and

To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness

To believe you can make a difference in the world,

So that you can do what others claim cannot be done

To bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

AMEN

ALL IS GRACE

Being Cast Into the Wilderness: Find a tree