

On the Road Again Isa 40:21-31, 1 King 19:1-9

Our next journey of walking with God is going into the wilderness. It's a beginning. It comes with a Warning: Do not walk in the wilderness alone. You will need a companion.

26 October 2014 I just finished reading the book by Susan Kidd Monk "When the Heart Waits" The key thought summarized from a quote in the book,

*"Egypt, wilderness, and promised land is comparable to interior states of being: larva, cocoon, and butterfly. In both journeys - inward and outward - there's first- a movement of separation, then a holding environment where transformation happens, and finally an emergence into a new existence." (p. 78)*

Have you ever noticed how music can bring back memories? Listening to Willie Nelson's song "On the Road Again." I hear this line: "Just can't wait to get on the road again, making music with my friends."

Those words take me back to childhood experiences. Making music: It captures those moments in time when my mother and all ten siblings would gather at my grandparent's house, the homeplace, and make music. Each could either sing or play a musical instrument from fiddle to guitar, piano, banjo, and mandolin. Now, only the youngest remains. Larry lives right next to the homeplace separated by a pasture where all the kids would gather on Sunday evening to play baseball, pick flowers, ride plow horses, explore the woods, run and play. Carefree on a Sunday's rest at the homeplace. On the road again.

It is one of the oldest, universal, and most important archetypal known to the humankind-the journey. Think of the journey of Abraham and Sarah, who struck out on faith into an unknown world and future; the journey of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery to the Promised Land; the journey of Ruth and Naomi; the journey of Jonah to Nineveh; the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem; and the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul.

In the literature world, I think of the writings of Homer and the journeys of Odysseus. In American literature, a good illustration is Mark Twain's, *Huckleberry Finn*. Often mistaken as a children's book, *Huck Finn* is a powerful social commentary on the harms of slavery and class distinction. And on the other hand, *Huck Finn* is the story of a boy's

inward, spiritual walk, his wilderness. He awakes during his journey down the Mississippi River on a raft with runaway slave Jim.

\*\*\*In essence, walking with God after our conversion, what we call sanctification, spiritual progression, discipleship, takes time. It involves waiting, moving to places you don't want to go, filled with moments of great pain for the emergence of a true-self. It begins with what I call the journey into the wilderness. The challenge is learning from the wilderness, rather than running away.

There are many runaway stories in the bible. Moses, Jonah, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul, King David. The prophet Elijah's journey is a runaway story. All walks into the wilderness proves to be a transforming experience. And your will too if you decide to take the trip. I remember the very first day at the spiritual direction when Dr. Bob Haden at Haden Institute, Hendersonville, NC, commented, "not everyone who takes the journey will survive." At that moment, I did not understand.

Journeys take us into the next phase, to the next step, to the next walk. Today, we are celebrating a new type of journey. The Walk with God marks embarking on a journey into the unknown. Into a new way of life where new skills emerge, new habits form, new friendships and relationships establish, in unexpected ways. You heard me say walking with God involves transition and transformation. It is listening for that small still voice. It is opening yourself to go to an unexpected place, into the darkness.

It begins with a walk into the wilderness. The journey stories serve as a metaphor for all of us. The wilderness is an opportunity to understand our walk with God, ourselves, and others. God uses the wilderness for moments of preparation for the next step. The good news is we can learn from others who have already taken this journey.

Elijah was doing God's will, warning a nation that they had strayed away from their first love. Where does Elijah find himself? Elijah is alone, exhausted, frightened, suffering, in a deep depression because his life is threatened by the evil queen Jezebel. Running away into the wilderness, Elijah sits down under a broom tree, wishing he could die. As the story goes, an angel appears to him, provides him provisions he needs for the journey ahead. How long will it last? Forty days, forty years. So what can we learn from poor old Elijah?

***When you face the unknown, you want to run away. Elijah walks into the desert stands on the edge of the unknown. On the edge of the wilderness, you begin to experience moments of internal emptiness – Unhappiness, despondency, and feeling lost.***

With solitude comes great perils. You turn inward. It's a time of confusion, disconnection, alienation, depression, and great unhappiness with life. I call it holy discontentment. You are searching for something, but you don't quite know what. There is a **looming emptiness inside** of you. The wilderness journey can emerge spontaneously or erupt by a life crisis (e.g. breakup, divorce, death, trauma, illness, major life change). This pandemic forces us into the wilderness. Lent can feel like a wilderness. You wonder if you will survive. Elijah reaches that point.

***In the wilderness, Elijah reaches rock bottom. Elijah gives up. He has enough. He wants to die.***

When your world turns upside down, it forces you to let go, give up control, allow God to speak to you. You start to perceive reality differently. When you think all is lost, God begins to work in your life. God helps you to see through the lies and delusions propagated upon you. You feel unhappy with life, troubled. You see the worst rather than the best. You no longer see life as you once did in your previous state of content unawareness.

It begins a spiritual and mental transformation because you listen to experience the divine. Elijah is weary. He falls asleep. When he wakes up, God provides. Before him is the food he needs for the journey ahead. Noticed, Elijah is asked to eat twice. Elijah is now ready to walk and talk with God. For forty days, like Moses and Jesus, his walk in the desert has a purpose. Elijah's destination was to the mountain of God, where he rests and waits. **When you are between the proverbial "rock and hard place," you learn to wait. That's when God speaks. What a profound question.**

***What are you doing here? It is the beginning of moments of shifting perspectives when God speaks. It creates moments of seeking answers, meaning, and assurance.***

At this moment, you ask deep questions. You seek your life purpose, spiritual destiny, and the meaning of life itself.

Every wilderness journey is personal. It is also corporate. Our life journey is not about living up to other people's dreams or expectations. It is about finding ourselves and what is meaningful to us. As that clichéd quote says, "to thine own self be true." It is also corporate because we journey together.

As we journey through the wilderness and into an unknown future, there are essential anchors of hope that all of us need. Just as important on this walk is our spiritual attitude we approach the journey. Are we open to a sense of discovery and personal and corporate growth along the way? The good news is God will never leave us or forsake us. All we need to do is take a closer walk with Jesus. *Where He Leads Me, I will Follow.*

The world takes us away from God, but a wilderness brings us back to God.

We stand at the crosswalk of life, looking into the unknown. We look ahead, knowing God is leading us as a body of Christ. The outcome is amazing and wonderful. You will never be the same. Listen to Isaiah: once again in the translation of *The Message*:

Have you not been paying attention?  
Haven't you heard these stories all your life?

Don't you understand the foundation of all things?

God sits high above the round ball of earth.

The people look like mere ants.

He stretches out the skies like a canvas—  
yes, like a tent canvas to live under.

He ignores what all the princes say and do.

The rulers of the earth count for nothing.  
Princes and rulers don't amount to much.

Like seeds barely rooted, just sprouted,  
They shrivel when God blows on them.

Like flecks of chaff, they're gone with the wind.

<sup>25-26</sup> "So—who is like me?"

Who holds a candle to me?" says The Holy.

Look at the night skies:

Who do you think made all this?

Who marches this army of stars out each night,

counts them off, calls each by name  
—so magnificent! so powerful!—  
and never overlooks a single one?

<sup>27-31</sup> Why would you ever complain, O Jacob,

or, whine, Israel, saying,

"GOD has lost track of me.

He doesn't care what happens to me?"

Don't you know anything? Haven't you been listening?

GOD doesn't come and go. God *lasts*.

He's the Creator of all you can see or imagine.

He doesn't get tired out, doesn't pause to catch his breath.

And he knows *everything*, inside and out.

He energizes those who get tired,

gives fresh strength to dropouts.

For even young people tire and drop out,

young folk in their prime stumble and fall.

**(And here it the blessing of the wilderness)**

But those who wait upon GOD get fresh strength.

They spread their wings and soar like eagles,

They run and don't get tired,

they walk and don't lag behind.

*The LORD, your God, has blessed you in everything you have done. He has watched your every step through this great wilderness. During these forty years, the LORD your God has been with you and lacking nothing. - [Deuteronomy 2:7](#)*

### Let's Pray

Dear Lord, I know that wherever I am, you are with me—guiding, protecting, providing. You make a mountain into a resting place; You make streams flow in the desert; You cause a root to grow out of the dry ground. Thank You for allowing me to see You work when all hope seems lost.

To be successful during the wilderness journey that lays ahead, I have learned that proper physical care is essential: enough sleep and rest, eating healthy foods, and getting the right amount of exercise. All of this is needed to help you deal with what lies ahead and take the next step.

As we receive the Great Thanksgiving today, consider this Holy Sacrament as preparing your heart, mind, and soul for the journey into the wilderness. It is the food that will feed our souls.

### The Lord's Prayer

Leader: And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, Let us pray: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

**Breaking of the Bread and Blessing of the blood of Christ:** We break this bread to share in the body of Christ. We are many, we are one body because we all share in one bread.

We drink from the cup, preparing us for the journey ahead. Take, Eat, Drink and allow God to renew your strength.

God waits for us to come in from the desert and be refresh. Rest, and wait.

Now, God has called us to journey for a season through the wilderness places.

Jesus did before us. We set out once more to wander in an uncomfortable landscape and wrestle with its challenges. We will not travel alone. Through the tempering action of the Spirit, we will emerge ready to do the work of the Kingdom.

Let us pray: we give you thanks, Heavenly Father for the journey ahead. On this journey, we will find the peace that the world won't destroy. The joy of the challenging Holy Spirit, and the hope of the Three in One. May we begin. Surround, and encourage us today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen