

Having trouble viewing this email? [Click here](#)



EREMOS CONSULTING GROUP

*Facilitating Transformation for
Clergy, Congregations, Nonprofits
and their Leaders*

"Eremos" is Greek for wilderness, desert. It is the same root word that is used to describe the desert mothers and fathers. It is the name of this consulting group because it speaks to the sense of isolation, wandering, and helplessness that can occur in the wilderness, and yet also calls to the hope, nurture, renewal, and clarity that one also finds in the wilderness. It is during this complex experience of lostness, profound awe, fear, and ultimately clarity of purpose where Eremos Consulting seeks to be a resource and consultant with those going through such an experience.

At this time of year we are entering the season of Lent in the Christian tradition and within a few weeks will be entering the Jewish Passover remembrance. Both traditions highlight wilderness stories and honor wilderness experiences. In both of these traditions we choose to delve deeper into the letting go of what was and instead move more fully into the presence and leadership of the Holy Other in our lives.

When I recently heard Rev. Dr. Eric Smith preach a sermon on the wilderness experience of Jesus, I asked if he would be willing to be a guest contributor, with the text from his sermon as the article. Fortunately he agreed, and so you are also privy to his message that weaves together the blessings and challenges and temptations and clear vision that the Holy Other leads us to and through in our own wilderness experiences.



Scripture Reference: Matthew 3:13-4:11

There aren't too many stories that are told in three of the four gospels, and there are fewer still that are told in three or four gospels in the same order. But this story, this story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, is told in Mark, and in Matthew, and in Luke - and in every case this story always comes right after the baptism of Jesus. Jesus is baptized, and the heavens open up, and the Spirit of God descends like a dove and says "This is my Son the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased," and as soon as those words are said, the very next sentence is Jesus being led, or in the gospel of Mark Jesus is being driven, into the wilderness by that very same Spirit. **No sooner had that blessing come, no sooner had the affirmation rested on his head, than Jesus found himself deeper and deeper in the desert**, farther and farther into that wild and deserted place where the Spirit had made him go.

Wilderness is a clarifying place. Wilderness is where things become less complicated; wilderness is where the unimportant drops away and the consequential reveals itself. Do you know

Serving Colorado and the Rocky Mountain Region

[www. EremosConsulting.com](http://www.EremosConsulting.com)

In This Issue

On Wilderness & Blessings

Resources



Where the Breath Begins

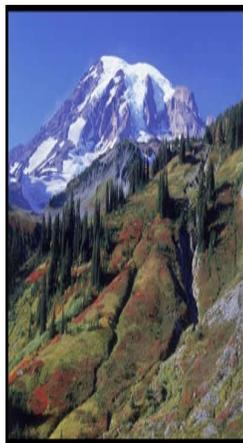
by Jan Richardson
from *Circle of Grace*

Dry
and dry
and dry
in each direction.

Dust dry.
Desert dry.
Bone dry.

And here
in your own heart:
dry,
the center of your chest
a bare valley
stretching out
every way you turn.

what I mean? How many of us have traveled in a wilderness of whatever kind? How many of us have hiked through the wilds of the Rocky Mountains, and felt the world recede over the horizon? That kind



of wilderness can be so clarifying. How many of us have passed through the wilderness of grief, after the flurry of condolences has stopped and we are left alone there facing our loss? How many of us know that wilderness? How many of us have passed through the wilderness of illness, where everything that seemed so important suddenly wasn't? How many of us have lived in the wilderness of failure, or of heartbreak, or of disappointment? **How many of us know too well the wilderness where we wonder about our purpose, and where we ask ourselves if somehow we missed our calling?** Wilderness is a

clarifying place, whether we are high among the trees or low in the valleys of doubt and fear; wilderness is a clarifying place because it puts "alone" with who we are.

I think this is what happened to Jesus. Think about where Jesus had been in this story so far; in Matthew so far Jesus was born in this miraculous way with lots of hubbub about it with wise men and stars and murderous kings and narrow escapes, it's all very dramatic and important-sounding and impressive, and then we don't hear from him again until he's a full grown man, and he's standing by a river asking to be baptized. **We don't know what kind of life Jesus had lived all that time, but the fact that he's standing by that river tells us that maybe he had reached a certain place in his life.** Maybe he had discovered something about himself. Maybe he had come of age and joined in his father's work, hauling water or breaking stone or fitting beams for houses, maybe he had joined his father's work and settled into a life in his hometown, and maybe for a long time that was enough, maybe for a long time he was content, because after all he was pushing thirty when he found himself by that river, not young anymore by the standards of those days. Maybe for a while he had found a good life.

But maybe one day a thought occurred to him. **There used to be this joke in the evangelical circles I used to run in, and it went, "has it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God?" That's a joke that assumes that you think God is omniscient, that God knows all things, and maybe God does for all I know but I tend to think that God is as capable of surprise as the rest of us.** And more so with Jesus. I think Jesus was plenty capable of having things occur to him, and so maybe one day as he was finishing up his work a thought occurred to him, and I bet it went something like this: "Am I doing the thing I am supposed to be doing? Is this what I was put here to do, or is there something else?" Maybe some of us have had that thought before; maybe some of us know what that voice sounds like. Maybe that's what the Spirit sounds like as it's leading you, or even as it's driving you, out toward the wilderness. Maybe that's what Jesus heard.

Because at 30 years old Jesus found himself standing by the river asking to be baptized, and that's not the sort of thing you do if you think everything's going fine. That's not what you do if you're interested in the status quo; **you don't ask the crazy guy at the river to put you under and**



Did you think this was where you had come to die?

It's true that you may need to do some crumbling, yes.

That some things you have protected may want to be laid bare, yes.

That you will be asked to let go and let go, yes.

But listen.

This is what a desert is for.

If you have come here desolate, if you have come here deflated, then thank your lucky stars the desert is where you have landed- here where it is hard to hide, here where it is unwise to rely on your own devices, here where you will have to look and look again and look close to find what refreshment waits to reveal itself to you.

I tell you, though it may be hard to see it now, this is where your greatest blessing will find you.

I tell you, this is where you will receive

pull you back up again if you feel like everything makes sense and your whole life is working out like you thought it would. That's not what you do. You end up at that river if you've heard that voice, if you've felt the nudge of that spirit, asking whether this is really what you are supposed to be doing.



So he got down in the river and he came back out again and the heavens opened up and the voice came down and it must have felt a whole lot like he made the right choice. **If only the signs were always that clear, a voice from heaven praising you for every decision.** And I imagine Jesus probably cracked a smile as he came back up the bank, but then-"immediately" if you ask the gospel of Mark- the spirit came. The spirit came and led him off to the wilderness. **Immediately, while his clothes were still dripping, Jesus found himself on the path to some wild place.** Immediately, while the dove was still wheeling its way back up to the sky, Jesus was on the way to that lonely deserted place to figure it all out.

Sometimes these wildernesses do come just when you think you have it all figured out, right? They're sneaky times, popping up just when you've figured out your plans, just when you think you've settled into something. You find yourself being led towards these wildernesses right at those moments when you've gotten a grip on things and suddenly that voice comes along asking, "is this really right? Is this really where I should be spending my time? Is this really the relationship I want? Is this really what I want my friends to know about me? Is this really everything there is to know? Is this really the way I want my voice heard in this world? Am I really going to live my life and die fitting beams for houses in Nazareth?"



Is this what I'm supposed to be doing?"

I think Jesus heard that voice, and I think he felt that pull, and I think that's how he ended up in the wilderness. **Three of the gospels tell it in just this way; baptism, then wilderness, as if the experience of wilderness has to follow after the experience of baptism,** as if baptism itself, as if the experience of ending up by that river there in the middle of your life, propels you out of the place of comfort and steals you into some new and wild space. Baptism and then wilderness, **and in the wilderness, in the wild places, there are wild things.** And the gospels tell us that after forty days and forty

nights Jesus met the devil there.

And the devil said, "look at you. You must be hungry. Forty days and forty nights in the desert is enough to take its toll on anybody. And anyway I heard what that voice from heaven said back there, I know how powerful you must be, why don't you make yourself more comfortable? Why don't you make yourself something to eat?" **So the first temptation for Jesus in the wilderness was to imagine that everything up to that point, all the power he had and all the affirmation he had received and all the gifts he possessed, the first temptation was to imagine that that was all for himself.**

The first temptation was to think that he should use all that to make himself more comfortable, to make his own belly full. That's the devil you face in the wilderness. And Jesus said no.

your life again.

I tell you,
this is where
the breath begins.



Born of Water,
Born of Spirit
by Jan Richardson

Beautiful poems, liturgies, and artwork for personal and corporate use. For these terrific resources and inspiration, please visit Jan's website, subscribe to her regular posts, or read any of her books.

You will come away feeling refreshed and grounded!

www.paintedprayerbook.com



**Planning for
Congregational Care
Training?
Leadership Retreats?
Upcoming
Sabbatical? Want to be part
of a peer clergy wellness
group?**



**Eremos Consulting
can help!**

We offer a variety of
programs for laity and clergy

And the devil said, "look at you. You must be pretty important. I heard about those wise men who came to see you, I heard about how even as a baby you spooked king Herod. I bet nothing bad could ever happen to you. I bet there are angels just waiting to pick you up when you fall down." So the second temptation was to pride.

The second temptation was to look at yourself and notice that the world was set up to serve you and then to conclude that it was supposed to be that way, that it was good that it was that way. This temptation was to self-regard. That's the devil you face in the wilderness. And Jesus said no.



And the devil said, "look at you. And look at me. And look at this world. Think of what we could do together. Think of the power we could hold. Think of the kingdoms we could rule. Think of the people who would serve us. Think of the reign we could have." So the third temptation was to power. **The third temptation was the natural outgrowth of the first two. Make yourself comfortable. Assume that you are special and that the world ought to serve you. Grab all the power you can. That is the devil you face in the wilderness.** And Jesus said away with you. **Jesus said no to all of that.**

Wilderness is a clarifying place. Jesus, after forty days and forty nights and three temptations, Jesus seems to have come to one of those understandings that you only get in the wilderness. He seems to have found clarity. Because in every gospel it goes like this: baptism, and then temptation, and then ministry. In every case Jesus goes forth from his time in the wilderness and he is not a carpenter in Nazareth anymore. He is fitting no more beams for houses. **He is no longer hearing the small voice of the spirit anymore. He is instead speaking with the voice of the Spirit.** One verse after he left the wilderness, Matthew says Jesus left Nazareth and moved to another place. Six verses later he called the first disciples. A dozen or so verses after Jesus left the wilderness, we have Matthew 4:24, not even half a page later, and it says this. "So his fame spread...and they brought him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them." Jesus had become Jesus. **Jesus went to the river asking himself whether he was doing what he was put here to do. Jesus went out of the river and into the wilderness to find the clarity of his purpose. And Jesus came out of the wilderness and into the world transformed, made new, possessed of purpose and power and direction and the mission he was given by God.**



This is the beginning of Lent. **Lent is the season in which we enter our own kind of wilderness, a place and a time of waiting, of discerning, of discovering, of reflecting.** Lent is a time of preparation, a time meant to break us out of our old lives and routines and meant to cause us to ask, am I doing the things I was put here to do? Am I listening to that voice? Am I being led, am I being driven, toward some wilderness, and if I am, or if I am already there, what does this wilderness have to teach me about myself and my place and my power? The season of Lent is a time of preparation, not just for Easter, but for the resurrection of our lives, for the rebirth of

and provide thoughtful coaching & consultation for your wilderness experiences.

Contact Elizabeth Thompson
at
303-902-7805
for more information.

our purpose, for the discovery of our ministry in the world. Jesus went into the wilderness a carpenter and he came out healing the sick and raising the dead and preaching the kingdom of God.

As we enter Lent, we enter the wilderness. And so we ask: what will we come out doing?

Rev. Dr. Eric C. Smith
Teaching Minister, First Plymouth Congregational UCC
Visiting Assistant Professor of the History of Christianity and New Testament Studies, Iliff School of Theology

*Blessings on your wilderness journey!
Elizabeth*

Rev. Elizabeth Denham Thompson
303-902-7805
ethompson@EremosConsulting.com



Rev. Elizabeth Denham Thompson
Principal Owner & Consultant
Eremos Consulting Group
303-902-7805
ethompson@EremosConsulting.com

Eremos Consulting Group, 7461 South Gallup Way, Littleton, CO 80120

[SafeUnsubscribe™ {recipient's email}](#)

[Forward email](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [About our service provider](#)

Sent by ethompson@eremosconsulting.com powered by

