

# 1ST SUNDAY IN LENT

Rev. Cara Heafey, Associate Minister, Summertown URC



*Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler*

## READ: MARK 1:9-15

---

"And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness."

## REFLECT:

On Wednesday we entered the season of Lent. In pre-Covid times many Christians would have marked Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, with a smudgy ash cross daubed on the hand or forehead; a reminder of our mortality and a mark of repentance. And now, stretching ahead of us until Easter, we remember and perhaps try to live into the story that the Gospel-writer Mark speeds through in just 2 verses - the liminal space between Jesus' baptism and public ministry - 40 days in the wilderness.

Last week I encouraged you to remember your 'mountaintop moments'. This week, I invite you to reflect on your own formational wilderness times.

Seasons of wilderness and exile are a big theme in the stories of our faith. The wilderness is a rich metaphor. It's an 'in between' place, a place where we're removed or cut off from the bustling routines of ordinary life. It can be harsh, tough, a place of deep struggle. It's a place of transformation; a place that shapes and changes us.

For some of us individually, and for our churches collectively, these long periods of lockdown and social-distancing have been a kind of wilderness time. Grief can be a wilderness, too. A painful period of disorientation and estrangement as we learn to assimilate loss.

I drew the weird little comic strip enclosed during one of my own wilderness times, a period in my early 20s when my faith seemed to have unraveled. I was struggling to come to terms with my sexuality, and with my theology degree's brutal dismantling of everything I thought I knew about the God and the Bible. As well as spending a good deal of time in the Half Moon pub on St Clements discovering the joys of real ale and live folk music, I spent many hours in Port Meadow, weeping, praying, laying on the ground with my palms to the earth - sometimes in the rain - struggling in solitude with my demons. I don't want to romanticize this time, but it was kind of a right of passage for me, a part of growing up. I came out on the other side wounded and wiser.

Philosopher/theologian J.D. Caputo writes about the value of the Spirit's driving us out of our comfort zones, as well as calling us back home: *"On my accounting we ought to pass our days slipping back and forth between the two, giving the desert of the secret its due while all along seeking out the hospitality of our historical traditions and the shelter of our culture, without which we would simply perish."* (*On Religion* p.36)

Without wanting to trigger traumatic memories for anyone, I wonder if there have been wilderness times in your own life or faith that have shaped the person you are today? Can you identify any 'ministering angels'? Does the distance of time give a different perspective on what was going on? Where was God in it?

## A LENT PRAYER:

Wild and restless spirit of God, accompany our Lenten journeys. Give us courage to spend time in the wilderness, the place where you bring us face to face with ourselves. Help us to pray with honesty. Help us to live with simplicity. Make us hungry and thirsty for your life-giving presence.

When we return to the comforts of our lives and the company of others, may we do so as those who have been transformed by the sharp truths of the desert. Amen.

## RESOURCES:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:  
[www.wheatleyurc.org.uk](http://www.wheatleyurc.org.uk)

## SUPPORT:

Pauline and myself, and your elders, are here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Ping us an email or give us a ring.

the adventures  
of  
**URBAN  
Fairies**  
★ FOLLY ★  
★ GIRL ★

