

Wilderness

WORDS FOR WORSHIP

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ASH WEDNESDAY

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: This day

All: is the start of something new.

One: This day

All: marks the beginning of a season.

One: This day

All: reminds us who we are.

One: This day

All: reminds us who we long to be.

One: So on this day,

All: let us worship God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Creator God,

You breathed life into dust. You dreamed me up and brought me into existence.

The least I could do would be to follow you, but even that is hard.

Forgive me for my distracted ways. Remind me that in life and in death, I belong to you.

On my best days and on my worst days, I belong to you.

Amen.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We have been in the wilderness—

All: Discerning and working, seeking and dreaming.

One: We have been in the wilderness—

All: Grieving and wondering, praying and hoping.

One: We have been in the wilderness—

All: Longing and running, creating and waiting.

One: We have been in the wilderness, but we have not been alone; for God walks with us, every step of the way.

All: So let us worship the God of our darkest nights and our brightest days.

One: Let us worship Holy God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God,

You invite us to plant a garden of love and harmony, but we grow weeds of prejudice and hatred. You invite us to sow joy and gratitude, but we scatter seeds of greed and envy. You call us to tend the soil of fear and denial, but instead we close our eyes and let the earth suffer. Forgive us. You invited us to plant a garden, and we lost ourselves in the wilderness. Clear our hearts.

Breathe life into these weary bones and grant us a fresh start.

Gratefully we pray, amen.

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

Family of faith,

When we come to this table, we come with wilderness scars.

Scars from moments when we didn't belong,

And memories of nights that felt too long.

The wilderness is inescapable from time to time,

So that is why we *have* to come to this table.

Because here at this table, all belong.

Here at this table, the night never wins.

And here at this table, we remember that life overcomes death.

So come—

Come with your prayers and your alleluias.

Come with your hopes and your dreams.

Come, not because you have to, but because you can.

And come, because each wilderness has its end.

Jesus is here—Jesus with his scars and empty tomb. So come.

GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING / PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE

God of the grave,

God of fresh air in lungs,

God of another tomorrow—

Today is a day unlike any day.

For they came in the dark—

Disciples and women,

Those who loved you,

Those who grieved for you.

They came in the dark with plans to bury you,

But love could not be buried.

So today is a day unlike any day,

For we are basking in light.

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GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING / PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE *(CONTINUED)*

Your goodness has found us
Like light finds the horizon,
Like moths find the light,
Like water finds the ocean.
Today is a day unlike any other day
Because the alleluias ring clear,
Hope echoes louder than fear,
And the wilderness seems to be kept at bay.

How did you do it?
Beating hearts long to know!
What was it like?
How did you feel?
Did it hurt?

But our biggest question is—why come back for us?
We admit, it is hard to wrap our minds around a love like yours—
A love that never runs out.
A love that never gives up.
A love that knows the darkness and has wilderness scars
And chooses us anyway.
It takes our breath away.

So today we run to you,
Just as those disciples ran to that empty tomb.
We run to you,
And we bring with us our hopes and our dreams,
Our prayers and our insecurities.
We bring with us gratitude for church steeples,
For cups of coffee and family recipes;
Gratitude for choirs that sound like angel choruses,
For sunrises that remind us that new life is dawning,
And for the names of our loved ones on the tips of our tongues.

However, we also run to you with concern
For those who still feel lost in the desert,
For those who are still weeping in the garden,
For those who cannot escape the darkness of Good Friday to see Easter Sunday.

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