

March 13, 2022
Guided Meditation: "The Fox and the Hen"
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 / Luke 13:31-35
Pastor Tim Emmett-Rardin

No sermon today. We're gonna try something a little different.

In a few minutes I'll be guiding you through a meditation meant to help focus your attention, just for a brief time, on wilderness, as we journey further with Jesus into this Lenten season. I'll be inviting you into gentle awareness of your own wilderness landscape – beginning with the wilderness, the barrenness, the brokenness you experience within yourself, and circling out wider to wilderness and barrenness and brokenness you witness in the wider world.

And in the midst of whatever that wilderness may be for you, whatever it may look and feel like for you, you'll also be invited to claim God's presence. The divine presence described in today's lectionary readings.

In the reading from Genesis, we find divine presence revealed in the form of covenant with Abram and his descendants. After Abram complained to God that he had no rightful heirs, "(God) brought (Abram) outside and said, 'Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then (God) said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness."

And "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram . . ."

In the Psalm, which we heard this morning as our Call to Worship, we find divine presence described as light, as strength, as shelter: "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? . . . Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. . . . For (God) will hide me in (God's) shelter in the day of trouble; (God) will conceal me under the cover of (God's) tent; (God) will set me high on a rock."

". . . Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!"

And finally, in Luke's gospel, divine presence described through a metaphor from Jesus. He's in Jerusalem and the Pharisees, the self-appointed keepers of the Law, beg him to leave the city because Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, wants to kill him.

And you just heard how Jesus responds: "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.'"

And then the metaphor, as Jesus laments over the holy city: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

The oppressive fox and the protective mother hen, at once vulnerable and fiercely strong.

The image on our bulletin cover this morning is actually a photograph of a mosaic that sits at the foot of the altar, inside the Church of Dominus Flevit in Jerusalem, on the western slope of the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem.

The mosaic recalling this verse from Luke, inscribed in Latin, encircling the image of the mother hen and her chicks. The church itself, its name meaning "the Lord wept" in Latin, shaped like a teardrop, recalling Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem when he weeps over its fate, its eventual destruction.

"How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings . . ."

So that's what we're gonna try this morning. Now you may or may not have experienced guided meditation before. If you have, I hope it was a good experience. If you haven't, if you're maybe feeling a little uneasy with this idea, that's OK. I would just

encourage you to acknowledge any dis-ease and participate anyway. To allow yourself to slow down and pay attention in a different way this morning.

So whether you are here in the chapel at Calvary or somewhere at home, or maybe even at work, make yourself as comfortable as you can, ideally with your feet firmly planted on the ground. With your palms up in a posture of openness. If you're at home or work, perhaps multi-tasking as we all tend to do when we're on Zoom calls, I'd ask to stop what you're doing if you're able to. If you're out walking your dog or something, I don't know what to tell you!

Those online may want to turn off your video as well. And I think it's helpful with this type of meditation to close your eyes, so if you're comfortable, I invite you all to do that now as a way to help further focus your attention, to limit the distracting thoughts that inevitably pop up in our minds.

Be still and notice the stillness. Be aware of your body, your head, your face, your torso, your arms and hands, your legs and feet. Be aware of your breath. Take a few deep breaths, and imagine releasing, with each exhale, whatever may be distracting you in this moment. Let it go if you can, for now. Notice your breathing, in . . . and out. Notice your heartbeat.

Now imagine a wilderness landscape. For Jesus it was the desert, so imagine yourself alone in a dry, barren desert. With no clear signs of life anywhere you look around you, as far as you can see. Imagine the hot sun beating down on you, your skin wet with sweat.

Now I invite you into a gentle awareness of the wilderness within yourself. The wilderness you're experiencing, you're carrying, in your mind or your body or your spirit. Turn your attention to those places in your mind or your body or your spirit, or all of the above, where you are feeling particularly tight or heavy. Where you're feeling weighed down, maybe even stuck. Where you're feeling stressed. Anxious. Confused or uncertain. Fearful. Shameful, filled with regret. Sad. Angry. Hopeless. Overwhelmed. Lonely or disconnected. Tired.

Focus your attention, for just a few moments, on those places within you, on what it feels like as you do.

You are alone in the desert wilderness, but now picture God, the divine presence, right there with you. Alongside you. Picture that presence as vividly as you can, in a way that you can actually see or feel. As light. As strength or courage or resilience. As hope. As peace. As joy. As shelter or shade. As relief, like a drink of cool water on a hot day. As comforting companionship, a friendly hand on our shoulder. As love, like a mother hen longing to gather you beneath her wings. To protect you from the foxes within that mean to bring you harm.

Focus your attention, for just a moment, on what THAT feels like. Notice your breathing. Notice your heartbeat.

You are by yourself in the wilderness desert, but you are not alone. You are never alone. The God who entered into covenant with Abram and his descendants is in covenant with you, too. Always.

Now I invite you to broaden your awareness a bit further, outside yourself, to any wilderness you're aware of among family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, within the various communities to which you belong. Bring to mind those people in your life, the weight of whose wilderness you also carry, in your mind or body or spirit. Turn your attention to their heaviness, and to those places where you are feeling their heaviness with them. Their stress. Anxiety. Uncertainty. Doubt. Fear. Grief. Anger. Hatred. Regret. Despair. Isolation. Fatigue.

Focus your attention, for just a few moments, on those places. Aware of what it might feel like for them, focus on where and how you're carrying that weight. Focus on what it feels like for you.

And now again, picture God, the divine presence, right there with and alongside them AND you. Again, picture that presence as vividly and specifically as you can, with them and with you, in a way that you can actually see or feel. As light. As strength or courage or resilience. As hope. As peace. As joy. As shelter or shade. As relief, like a drink of a

cool water on a hot day. As comforting companionship, a friendly hand on the shoulder. As love, like a mother hen, longing to gather them and you together beneath her wings. To protect them and you from the foxes that mean to bring harm.

Imagining what that might feel like for them, focus your attention, for just a moment, on what THAT feels like for you. Again notice your breathing. Notice to your heartbeat.

Even in the wilderness desert, they are not alone. You are not alone. We are never alone. The God who entered into covenant with Abram and his descendants is in covenant with US. Always.

Now, finally, I invite you into gentle awareness of wilderness even further beyond yourself, wilderness that you're aware of in Philadelphia, elsewhere in this country, in other places around the world, across the earth itself. The wilderness, the barrenness, the brokenness others – other people, other places – are experiencing right now, and that you also carry at some level in your mind or body or spirit.

Focus your attention on those people and places. Again, aware of what it might feel like for others, focus on where and how you're carrying that weight. Focus on what it feels like for you.

And now, again, again, picture God, the divine presence, alongside them and with you. Surrounding this city, this country, the world, the earth. Again, picture a presence, with those others and with yourself, that you can actually see or feel. As light. As strength or courage or resilience. As hope. As peace. As joy. As shelter or shade or safety. As relief. As companionship. As solidarity. As love, like a mother hen, longing to gather all of us, all the earth, together beneath her wings. To protect them and you from all the foxes that would kill.

Imagining what that might feel like for those others, focus your attention on what THAT feels like for you. Notice your breathing. Notice your heartbeat.

In the wilderness, we are not alone. We are never alone. The God who entered covenant with Abram and his descendants is in covenant with all of us. With all creation. Always.

Now, as you slowly ease your way back into the space we share, opening your eyes if you like but still picturing the divine presence with you, as light, as strength, as shelter, as loving mother hen, hear this prayer from Howard Thurman:

Open unto me — light for my darkness.
Open unto me — courage for my fear.
Open unto me — hope for my despair.
Open unto me — peace for my turmoil.
Open unto me — joy for my sorrow.
Open unto me — strength for my weakness.
Open unto me — wisdom for my confusion.
Open unto me — forgiveness for my sins.
Open unto me — love for my hates.
Open unto me — thy Self for my self.

Lord, Lord, open unto me!

Open unto all of us. May it be so.