

STAYING CONNECTED:



THE **GENEROSITY** OF LOVE

FROM THE VERY REVEREND ANNE MILLS

My Lenten journey began with being drawn to this prayer:

God, we thank you for the extraordinary generosity of your love, which takes us by surprise and refreshes us, and which always appears where we least think to look for it. Amen.

This prayer became my personal Lenten challenge and I have been deliberately aware of God's extraordinary generosity and love which does indeed often surprise us, refreshes us, and which appears where we least think to look for it. The key for me has been to look and to be aware of these moments in my life, to recognise them and to give thanks to God for them. And now, in the midst of lockdown with all its challenges and disorientation for our lives, this Lenten challenge has become even more pertinent to me!

One of the other surprises of my Lenten journey is that I have been and am being drawn to explore and reflect on my idea of *wilderness*. Two *wilderness* biblical texts have become particularly important to me. The first is Jesus's testing experience of temptation and loneliness in the desert as described in Mark chapter 1, and the second is found in Isaiah chapter 40. This remarkable and beautiful chapter explores the help that God offers to us when we need it most.

Paula Gooder, an English writer and lecturer in Biblical Studies, in her book *A Way Through the Wilderness: Experiencing God's help in times of crisis* suggests that when faced with times of crisis or challenge, many people turn to self-help books for support. But what about Christians, she asks? How can we find strength not merely in self-help but in God's help? And so I wonder what you imagine when you think of *wilderness*? What do you think, feel and see?

Gooder invites us to use the *wilderness* encounter in Isaiah 40 to think about what comfort is and what kind of comfort God seeks to offer those in need, to think about *wilderness* as a place not only of unhappiness but also comfort, to reflect on the possibility that God wants us to become his messengers of comfort, even when we need that comfort for ourselves, to think about how God as Creator and the message of hope that simply encountering God can give us, and finally to examine the last part of Isaiah 40, that beautiful passage that talks about rising up on wings like eagles and reflecting on having God's strength in our lives and what that might feel like.

And so my dear Friends, in this time, be encouraged, hold on to God's strength, a strength that is far greater than our minds can ever even imagine.

**BE SAFE. BE KIND.
STAY CONNECTED.**

We are together... but apart.

You are and will continue to be on my heart and in my prayers.

An article I have found helpful in my reflection on *wilderness* can be found in the Anglican Journal, Volume 146, March 2020 - *A Wilderness of Separation* by the Reverend Grace Delaney.

With every blessing,

Dean Anne

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