

Showing Up in My Wilderness  
by Rev. Dr. Robin Hawley Gorsline

There is something life-giving yet incongruous about two events in the life of Jesus, one where he is set apart alone—the wilderness—and one where he is the subject of widespread acclamation—the procession into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday.

I have been reading Brene Brown's book on wilderness in our lives (*Braving the Wilderness*), and it has caused me to think more deeply both about my journey as well as those of others. One of her main observations is how carefully and powerfully we resist feeling or even examining our own internal wildernesses as well as those of our society.

As a result, I have been working at being more conscious of wilderness in my life, the times where I have not, or do not, know exactly where I am and/or what to do, where the normal boundaries seem absent, where I sense danger or feel deep fear, where I feel lost.

And as I have been preparing for Lenten devotionals, I have been thinking about the wildernesses in Jesus' life—the 40 days in the wilderness yes, but those times when his friends abandon him, for example. And I wonder if he ever felt wilderness when praying apart from others. I know of times in my own prayer life where I have felt unanchored—even as I know God is with me.



So, I wonder how Jesus felt on the back of the colt, parading through Jerusalem. Did he just get into the adulation of the masses? Somehow I doubt it. He was too self-aware and too clear about his purpose to let adoring crowds carry him away.

He seems to have known the adulation would not continue and that he was headed to a bad end. So I wonder if that reality caused him to feel very alone, since no one else really grasped the enormity of his mission nor could see what was coming. It feels to me as if no one really understood him at the deep levels he was experiencing.

Of course, as in the 40 days, angels were present, and God through them. But in terms of being all by himself in both receiving the hosannas and knowing they would turn to derision and death, I can see what I think might have been a very lonely time, a day of wilderness where everything and everyone around him were experiencing one thing and he another.

When I think of biblical prophets and spiritual mystics I am reminded how much time they are on their own, with God of course but without human companionship, sometimes in physical locations not all that congenial. And I am reminded of how in my own life when I have chosen to take a stand to which others had strenuous objections, when I have chosen to lead, sometimes it has resulted in my feeling valued and connected to those around me, even praised, and sometimes I have felt very alone, not knowing where I am, who I really am, where I am going or need to go.

And then I think of Jesus and remember that he shows us what it means to show up, whether the crowds cheer or jeer, whether the authorities give praise or condemnation, whether the isolation runs 40 days or a lifetime or a day, Jesus shows up.

I need to remember that, and keep getting more honest about my own wilderness, including right now in Lent.