

The Gifts of Wilderness and Pain

by Peter Covington

I do not pretend that my longing for companionship is unique during the pandemic, but I tell my story because I know it is common, and we can relate our unique stories together as fellow travelers during this difficult period, much as Jesus related to our pain and we now relate to His during Lent.

My coming out happened only two years ago, as I realized I needed a man in my life, and left my wife and family. I did not have a particular plan in mind and unanticipated circumstances precipitated my unexpected change of direction. My wife had complained for many years that she did not feel loved by me, and continuing a life together with little love felt sad to me for both of us, so we decided to look again for love and go our separate ways.

I had many ups and downs in my search for a partner and learned a great deal about myself and about God during this period in the wilderness, as described in my book, Growing Your Own Truth, written under a pseudonym to “protect the innocent.” When the pandemic hit, I felt truly alone, as the virus has separated us for our own safety.

I spent my free time in my apartment, alone, worked via internet, again, alone. Talking to someone in line while waiting to enter a grocery store occasionally became the event of my week. I realize how tough those times were now that I am united with my love, Luis, who I work next to and come home to every evening. Sometimes I cry remembering how alone I once felt, and I thank God and Luis that love made a way to my apartment.

In some ways, I still feel a little bit broken and realize I got through the difficulties because love did make a way even via long distance. My connection with friends at MCCDC bloomed via Zoom, and I felt again the glow of fellowship and friendship.

Before Luis and I could live together, we maintained a wonderful long distance relationship and actually grew closer together in ways I never had with anyone. God kept reaching out to me—sometimes that can seem like a different sort of “long distance relationship”—teaching me

to trust in difficult financial circumstances, showing me productive ways to use my mind in writing, thinking, and trusting.

But this experience also felt like a time in the wilderness, not unlike the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, where he was tested, tempted, was alone, and went hungry. It focused him on his coming ministry and reinforced connection with God. Pain is not fun, but it can serve a purpose. In this time alone, I refocused on the enduring rather than ephemeral distractions, taking life much more seriously.



I suppose it's common to ask God why pain comes into our lives. But I also note that Jesus experienced it both in coming to earth and the 40 days in the wilderness where he was without human companionship even as angels ministered to Him. In Lent we can feel hungry, alone and estranged, but God continues to minister to us as well. Divine love does not disappoint, bringing us closer together.

The wilderness experience can be a good place to refocus and renew our minds as it has done for me. Pain can bring people together in a way that joy does not. We can understand each other's pain more easily as pain drives us together in search for consolation and resolution.

Find, wait, explore and see how love will make a way in your life. It is both a hope for the future and a surprising gust of warmth on a cold day, like finding a good conversation while waiting in line at the store or feeling God's help through a difficult situation.