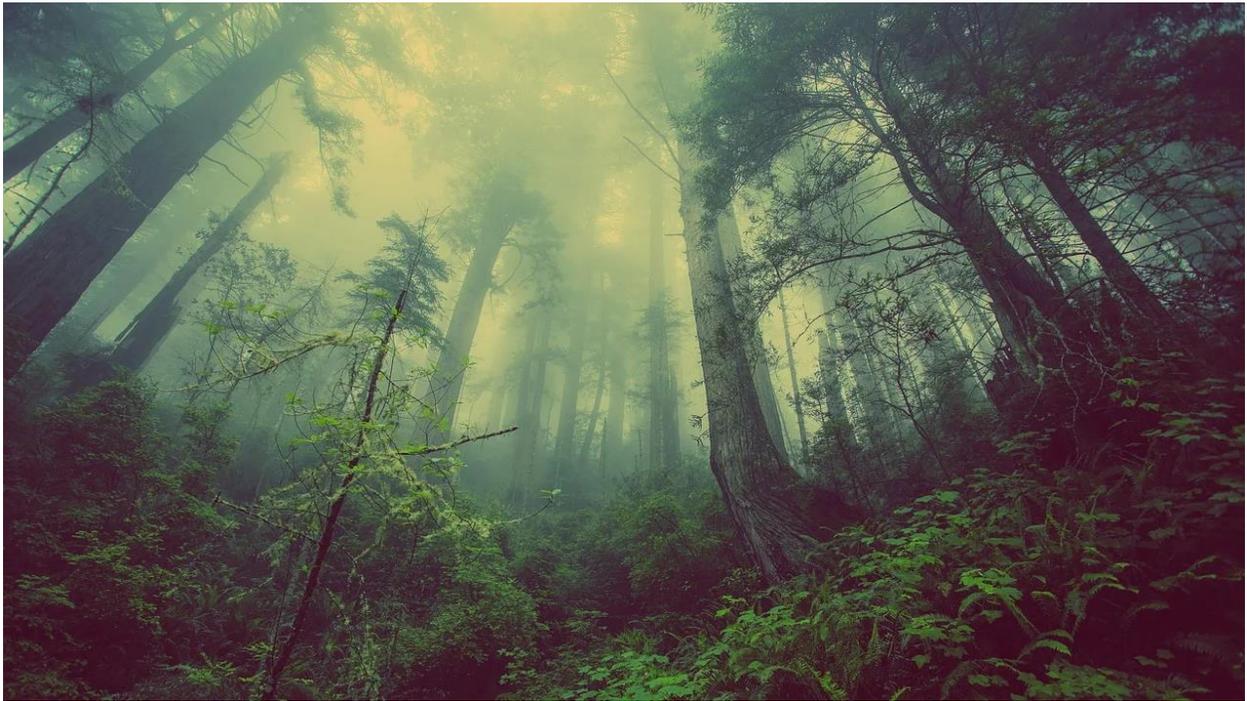


Sunday Service: March 14, 2021 (Fourth Sunday of Lent)

“Deep into the Woods”



Zoom service starts promptly at 10 am:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84841981079?pwd=OG1TMThyZFFQZ1Q0dStpZlJCdURUUT09>

Lent–Easter 2021 Theme: Going Deep

Nearly a year ago we entered the world of isolation and virtual connection with which all of us are now familiar. Suddenly the wilderness of Lent has become all too real, as we were stripped of our usual resources, surroundings, activities, and circles of relationship. During this time our world has experienced both deep grief and invitations to a new spaciousness of time, as we needed to release so much of what usually fills our lives.

In the Scriptures and the traditions of Lent, we see a scrubbing away of the excess to get to the core of our Christian journeys and of ourselves. The call to go deeper can be frightening or overwhelming when we feel we are not ready and do not know what we will find. We keep much of our pain in our depths. But only from these depths can the voice of God reach us and transform us.

FOCUS for Fourth Sunday of Lent

Deep in the woods: Called to deep commitment: We are transformed by God as we follow God’s voice along the path of life, a voice calling us to deep commitment. Even when our path leads deep into unfamiliar woods, as we lose ourselves, we are found.

1. GATHERING

Musical Prelude



Call to Worship

One: God, you ask us to set our minds on you, to walk before you and be blameless. You teach us what matters, and you do not hide your face from us.

Many: With each step along the path, we are transformed into who you made and called us to be.

One: God, you teach us that when we lose our life, we save it.

Many: With each step along the path, we hope against hope in your promises.

One: God, you say you will make us exceedingly fruitful, that you will bless us.

Many: With each step along the path, we take up our cross and follow you.

All: *We believe your everlasting covenant is to be God to us, and that we will live forever. We call out to you, as you call us deeper into this covenant.*

“Use what talents you possess; the woods would be very silent if no birds sang there except those that sang best.” — Henry Van Dyke

Opening Prayer

Opening Song

Prayer of Confession and Assurance

Many: Deep calls to deep. We call to you from the depths of our hearts.

One: We confess when we have stayed on the edges. Not listening to each other. Not taking the path you show. We confess when we have strayed from the way. Silencing suffering. Forfeiting life.

(Silence. Or name the forces that keep us from deep commitment.)

Deep calls to deep. You call to us from the depth of your love.

Many: Calling us to deep commitment. We come to you, God.

“Keep close to Nature's heart... and break clear away, once in awhile, and climb a mountain or spend a week in the woods. Wash your spirit clean.” — John Muir

2. HEARING GOD'S WORD

Scriptures (Genesis 17:1-19)

Genesis 17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me... and I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." 3 Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you... 15 God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" ...19 God said, "No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.

Message: "Deep into the Woods"



The deep woods is often portrayed as a dangerous place we should avoid. Woodland wanderings may evoke fears of getting lost or being attacked by unknown wild things that lurk in the shadows. But the woods can also be a place of deep healing if we only slow down. Once we slow down, our heart and brain slow down. Our worries and fears begin to dissipate as silence overcomes them. And if we listen long enough to the forest's silence, we soon realize that the deep woods are anything but quiet.

"I understood at a very early age that in nature, I felt everything I should feel in church but never did. Walking in the woods, I felt in touch with the universe and with the spirit of the universe." — Alice Walker

3. RESPONDING TO GOD



“When the green woods laugh with the voice of joy, And the dimpling stream runs laughing by; When the air does laugh with our merry wit, And the green hill laughs with the noise of it.” — William Blake

Response

Joys and Concerns

Sending Song

Sending Blessing

Go deep into the woods of your week, knowing that you are called to the kind of commitment that will not leave you comfortable. Our God is not to be fully known or neatly packaged. Be ever ready for the transformation that accompanies deep commitment. Go, expecting surprise. Amen.

Poems of the Woods (see next page)

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening



*Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.*

*My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.*

*He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.*

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

— Robert Frost

The Road Not Taken



*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves, no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

— Robert Frost