

## Slide 1

Welcome, I am posting this on Wednesday March 18 – as part of our Lenten reflection series. A new format, brought about by unexpected circumstances..

We are not sitting in a circle of chairs in the parlour, looking at familiar faces, or maybe some new ones, the lights dimmed and a candle ready to light. We are dis-located from the way we usually do things, and that's okay. So I hope you are able to see this slide show – either in powerpoint or google slides, and hear the commentary. I will also post the script on the website under sermon texts.

## Slide 2

We begin with prayer – you can say it with me -

**O God, This world, Your creation, Rolled into a sphere, Packaged in sunshine, or moonlight or star-speckled, gift-wrapped in love, we thank you. Like a mountain stream exuberant in its flow, you carry us into the river of your wisdom, and transport us - gloriously - effortlessly - to the ocean of your grace. Amen**

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Take a moment and think about one outdoor place where you have felt close to God...

## Slide 4

Here is a quote from John Muir, the American naturalist: *"I'd rather be in the mountains thinking about God, than in church thinking about the mountains,"*

## Slide 5

Many people can describe transcendent moments in nature where they feel deeply connected to something bigger than themselves. *Forest or Wild Church* is a way to explore that connection within community; it is either a new way, or perhaps a very old way, of being church.

So, forest church is a combination of 2 things – on the one hand it is prayer in the outdoors, on the other hand it is the life of faith in community. And it's not just Human community, either. It is intentional prayer WITH the natural world.

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Throughout the ages people have walked this path within the Christ tradition and have found a meaningful expression of their spirituality. They have found inspiration and structure through the rhythms of the seasons, the characteristics of plants and animals, and the sacredness of place. Along with the wisdom of the scriptures and the pattern of prayers, the place where we worship can deepen or distract our connection with God.

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We have this stereotype of all churches being held in buildings. From the first “house churches” or the catacombs – when early Christians were afraid to be out in public saying Jesus’ name. But one of the first stories of Paul’s missions took place by a river. In Acts 16:13 we read *“On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there.”*

## Slide 8 (Iona cross)

So think of the Desert Fathers and Mothers

Think of places like Iona – where we find standing Celtic crosses, out in the world, carved with pictures and symbols, to teach and worship under the sky.

## Slide 9 (Chaudiere falls)

And of course there are many, many non-Christian traditions – Chaudiere Falls, Stonehenge, Machu Piccu.

## Slide 10

Wild Church is a reminder that “church” is not the building – the building houses worship, programs, etc – but the word “church” from the greek is a group of people (like a political party) who are of of common mind or values. In the Christian tradition the church is the people gathered on common ground for God’s purpose.

There has been a flourishing of outdoor church in the last decade. There is a “wild church” network in North America. There are Canadian groups (who have mostly grown out of established congregations.) They are Anglican, Mennonite, and United churches, they are usually ecumenical and often non-denominational. Mostly they are found In British Columbia, southern Ontario (so far), but we could start one in Ottawa.

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Wild/Forest Church is not simply a pretty location for an informal but “regular” worship service. The move **outside** is a move toward the sacred indwelling of All that Is. It is an intentional decision to expand the “beloved community of faith” beyond human beings altogether. So it begins with time for listening – some walking, some standing (or sitting) – but always inviting creation into the community – to speak to us.

What makes it church is that it is in community – it is not a chance holy moment or an individual encounter of a thin place in the great outdoors. Research shows that many if not most people have felt closest to God in nature, whether it be in one of their favourite outdoor places, at camp or a solitary walk.

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But Forest Church/Wild church is intentionally IN community. There is a place and a time set aside by a community to listen and to be in partnership with creation and with our creator.

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We owe much to our indigenous peoples: *We honor those who have been in relationship with this land before us, the native, indigenous peoples who lived here for thousands of years before our ancestors, how they were in communion with the land and with the spirit in the world – whether we call that spirit God or Mother Earth or Creator. We enter into relationship with the land respectfully, asking permission and showing gratitude.*

So I invite you to go outdoors. In this time of social distancing, you might want to do it alone, or with someone you know, but keeping a safe distance. I am posting this early so that you can take advantage of the day light. If you can, save or print this poem and scripture. I am posting them along with the slide show or go to the website, under resources/documents and I will post the script, the poem and the scripture reading under Sunday sermon texts.

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The first is by Mary Oliver: stop walking for a moment to read the poem. Find solid footing, plant your feet on the ground and take a time of just listening. Filter out the human noise, the mechanical noise. Try to listen to the voice of creation. And when you are done, (you will know when you are ready) – read the scripture reading. It is both a blessing and a challenge for the days ahead.

If you want to sign in or comment on this reflection, go to the Facebook group or email me directly.

#### Slide 15

May peace be upon you!

(poem and scripture on next page)

Mary Oliver, beloved poet and wise sage, captures the essence of our forest church theology with her poem “Praying”

*It doesn't have to be  
the blue iris, it could be  
weeds in a vacant lot,  
or a few small stones; just  
pay attention, then patch*

*a few words together and don't try  
to make them elaborate, this isn't  
a contest but the doorway*

*into thanks, and a silence in which  
another voice may speak.*

Luke 12:24-27

Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

*Let us go forth – considering creation and learning from it. In the peace of Christ, Amen.*