



**Ash Wednesday Service Feb. 18, 2026 7pm**  
**First Congregational Church of Wiscasset**

We welcome guests and our friends from St. Philip's Episcopal Church.  
Special thank you to Roger Whitney and Rev. Suzanne Colburn from St. Philip's.

**Prelude**

*Lord Hear My Prayer*

**Greeting**

**Spoken Prayer**

**God who made us from the dust and ashes, breathe into us your breath of life. God who is kind and compassionate, welcome us with your forgiveness.**

**God who knows our frailty first-hand, lead us through the wilderness of transformation, for your glory, Amen.**

**Hymn #410 'Just As I Am'**

**Poem/ Prayer copied with permission from Richard Lyall**

L: In what we have done and neglected to do, in the good we intended but not followed through:

**P: [All]: Lord, we have fallen.**

[Pause in silence]

L: For our wandering off and forgetting your ways; for leaving you out of our moments, our days:

**P: [All]: Lord, we are sorrowful.**

[Pause in silence]

**[All]: Lord, in dust and in ashes we turn our hearts back to you and seek your forgiveness. Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord have mercy.**

[Pause in silence]

L: From the ashes you lift us, erasing our shame. You grant fresh beginnings and restore us again.

**[All]: Lord, you have raised us.**

[Pause in silence]

L: Lord you draw us back to you and forgive us our wrongs. You replace our lamenting with worshipful songs.

**[All]: Lord, we are grateful.**

[Pause in silence]

### **Responsive Reading : Joel 2:1-2, 12-17**

L: Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm on my holy mountain!

Let all tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near—

**P: A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!**

**Truly the day of the Lord is great. Who can endure it?**

L: Yet, even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.

**P: Return to the Lord, your God, for God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.**

L: Blow the trumpet in Zion: sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people.

**All: Cleanse the congregation; weep tears of repentance.**

**Pray, “Have mercy, O God, on your people.”**

**Prayers of the people: After each joy or Concern please resound:**

**Minister:’ God’ Congregational response: ‘Hear our Prayer’**

### **The Lord’s Prayer**

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

### **Scripture Reading Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

6 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Prayer

5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Fasting

16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

**Reflection: A Secret Journey**

**Rev. John Hogue**

**Hymn #189 ‘ Beneath the Cross of Jesus’**

**A Time of Confession Psalm 51**

L: Have mercy on us, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out our transgressions.

**P: Wash us thoroughly from our iniquity, and cleanse us from our sin! For we know our transgressions, and our sin is ever before us.**

L: Against you, you only, have we sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

**P: Hide your face from our sins, and blot out all our iniquities.**

L: Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.

**P: Cast us not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from us.**

L: Restore to us the joy of your salvation, and uphold us with a willing spirit.

**P: For you will not delight in sacrifice, or we would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.**

L: Our sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. *-from Psalm 51:1-4; 9-12; 16-17 (ESV)*

**Absolution and Reconciliation**

**The Almighty and merciful God, God of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit**

among us for the forgiveness of sins; and in the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

### **The Imposition of Ashes**

**L: The Lord be with you.**

**P: And also with you.**

**L: Let us pray: Almighty God, you created us out of the dust of the earth; grant that these ashes may be to us a sign of our mortality and penitence, so we may remember that only by your gracious gift are given everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior . Amen.**

**Those who wish are invited to come to either the front of the Sanctuary to receive ashes either on the back of the hand or on the forehead. Ashes serve as a sign of human mortality, penitence and as a reminder that only by God's grace are we given eternal life. Ashes are imposed with the words of Genesis 3:19**

**“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”**

**Hymn #198 ‘Jesus Remember Me’ (Sing Twice)**

### **Charge and Benediction**

**L: Choose this day whom you will serve;**

**P: we will choose the living God.**

**L: The road is narrow that leads to life;**

**P: we will walk the way of Christ.**

**L: Faith is not our holding on;**

**P: faith is letting go.**

**L: We offer more than words, O God;**

**P: we offer you our lives.**

**Postlude**

*Amazing Grace*

## Feb 22 Sermon

### A Spirit Led Journey 2/22 FCCW Rev. John Hogue Deut 8:1-5; 15-18 Mark 1:9-13

A Spirit-led journey reminds me of a very spiritual experience many of us have had here in Maine... trying to find a place “just a little off the main road.” You know how this goes. Someone gives you directions like:

“Turn left where the old bait shack used to be — not the new one, the old one — then go past the tree that looks like a moose, and if you hit the ocean, you’ve gone too far.” Your GPS? Completely confused. “Recalculating... praying for you... good luck.”

Before long, you’re driving deeper into the woods thinking: Well, this is how every mystery show starts. You start wondering:

- “Do people actually live out here?”
- “Will I ever see cell service again?”
- “Is this still a road or just a suggestion?”

Then — just when you think you’re lost — you find a beautiful harbor view or the perfect lobster shack or in the western mountains a wonderful maple house setting and say: “Okay... the journey was worth it.”

Beloved, that’s a lot like a Spirit-led life.

God sometimes leads us down roads we wouldn’t choose, through wilderness we didn’t plan, into places where we feel uncertain.....but somehow, God knows exactly where we’re going —even when we don’t. That’s exactly what our scriptures today show us: God leads people on journeys that feel confusing, challenging, even wild — yet those journeys are where faith grows. Yet unlike Maine directions... **God never forgets where the bait shack used to be.**

Would you agree with me that life has both mountaintop moments and desert days? There are times when you feel on top of the world, and others when it feels like you’re just stumbling through the dust. There are times when you feel well fed, comfortable and surrounded by loved ones, and others where you’re hungry, thirsty, lonely and tired. In our relationship with God, we have moments when we feel very close to God - perhaps at Pilgrim Lodge, a worship event, enjoying your coffee in the morning, on a retreat or a holiday. Then we have other days when God seems far away, when we doubt God or struggle with temptations. If you feel like that, you are not alone. Everyone has these ups and downs, these mountaintop moments and desert days. Our Lent series is going to help us **journey** with Jesus through the desert wilderness.

Today I want to highlight three things about our wilderness experiences.

**1) Wilderness is not a sign of God's absence.** The people of Israel experienced a huge mountaintop moment. They were led out of slavery in Egypt and then God parted the Red Sea, allowing them to pass. They celebrated this by singing a joyful worship song, dancing and playing percussion instruments (Ex. 15). They were on top of the world. Yet very quickly they reach a desert or wilderness called Shur, where there is no fresh water. Here their joy turns to grumbling, their worship turns to distrust. They immediately doubt that God is with them. They start to long for their days in Egypt, and complain that they are going to die. Yet in both the deserts of Shur and Sin, God provides for them: with fresh water and with Manna bread and quail meat.

Our passage from Deuteronomy shows us the reason why all this happened: When we experience the struggles of the wilderness we should not see them as punishments from God, or signs that God is uncaring or non-existent. Instead we should see that the wilderness is an opportunity for God to test our hearts. Do we really trust in God, or do we trust in our own abilities?

### **2) We are led by the Spirit into the wilderness**

Jesus begins his ministry with a very similar pattern to the people of Israel. He passes through the waters - not the Red Sea, but the waters of baptism in the Jordan river. Again, this is a mountaintop experience, where the Spirit descends and the voice of his Father speaks words of affirmation and devotion: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Mk. 1:11). We might expect that after this high-point Jesus would launch into his ministry of preaching and demonstrating the Kingdom of God. Yet this is not what happens. Like Israel before him Jesus goes from the waters to the wilderness, from spiritual feasting to the struggle of fasting, from affirmation to loneliness and temptation. "At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness." (Mark 1:12)

Have you experienced that? Moments where you thought God was calling you, sending you, empowering you, followed by setbacks or disappointments? Times of refreshing followed by periods of dryness? **If so, take heart that you are following in the footsteps of Jesus. Wilderness is often a place that the Spirit of God leads us to.**

### **3) Wilderness is a place of worship and transformation**

Ultimately, God leads us into the wilderness so that we might learn to worship. He says to Pharaoh through Moses: "Let my people go that they may worship me in the wilderness." (Exodus 7:16) Worship in the wilderness might look quite different to worship on the mountaintop. It is great to have joyful hymns and songs, to celebrate with

banners and colors and people. But wilderness worship is often about taking away rather than adding more. It might involve aspects of worship such as fasting, or solitude, or simplicity. It might turn us towards silence, or lament, or giving things away. **Better yet, let us give away ripples of kindness and compassion around us.**

Imagine in your mind, you are walking towards Jesus, and Jesus is reaching out his arms to embrace you. However, as you look down your arms are full of stuff. What is it that your arms are full of - the things that you rely on for your worship and your life? Are they full of musical instruments; full of computers or books; full of food and drinks; full of work and activity; full of relationships and family? None of these are bad things, in fact they are gifts of God. But God knows that for us to grow in him we might need to start putting down some of these things we're carrying.

Lent and wilderness is about laying down some of these things until we have empty hands. Hands held out ready to receive from God, to be embraced by God. Some of us may feel we have had wilderness thrust upon us. You might be going through a desert time right now as many folks in America are experiencing. God is with us, God never wants to see you suffer but God is passionate to see you trust in God and learn to worship in the wilderness. God in simplicity will prepare us for whatever lies ahead. Israel was transformed through her wilderness worship. We can be too.

Consider two of the many saints who have been transformed by the wilderness experience: Anthony the Great. Anthony lived from (251–356 AD), often called the father of Christian monasticism, literally went into the desert wilderness.

- After his parents died, Anthony heard Jesus' words in church: "Sell what you have... and follow me."
- He gave away his wealth and went into the Egyptian desert.
- There he faced intense loneliness, temptation, fear, and spiritual struggle.
- Instead of breaking him, the wilderness deepened his faith and clarity.
- People began seeking him out for wisdom, healing, and spiritual guidance.
- His life sparked the entire Christian monastic movement — thousands pursued lives of prayer and service because of his witness.

What feels like abandonment can become preparation. The wilderness became his calling.

Harriet Tubman. She described her leadership of enslaved people to freedom as being directed by the Holy Spirit.

- Born into slavery, she escaped alone.
- She later returned repeatedly to dangerous territory to lead others to freedom.

- She navigated forests, swamps, and wilderness routes of the Underground Railroad.
- Tubman spoke openly about visions, dreams, and divine guidance directing her decisions.
- She led about 70 people to freedom and never lost a single passenger.

The wilderness was not just physical terrain — it was fear, danger, and uncertainty — yet it became a pathway for liberation.

There's something about Maine that teaches you respect for the journey.

You don't just arrive at places here — you travel winding roads, face changing weather, and sometimes wonder if your GPS has given up and gone home. In Maine, the journey shapes you. And scripture tells us the same is true with God.

Today's texts remind us of a deep spiritual truth:

God leads us not only into blessing — but also into wilderness. The wilderness is where faith grows. **The Wilderness Is Not Punishment — It's Formation**

God provided manna — daily bread they could not store or control.

They had to trust God every morning. Wilderness living teaches dependence.

Then we turn to Jesus in Mark's Gospel. Immediately after his baptism — after hearing, "You are my beloved Son" — the Spirit drives him into the wilderness.

Notice this:

- The Spirit leads him there.
- The wilderness follows affirmation.
- Testing follows a calling.

Even Jesus walks the Spirit-led wilderness path.

If we're honest with each other, we prefer smooth sailing.

We want:

- faith without struggle,
- growth without discomfort,
- resurrection without wilderness.

**However, God shapes people the way Maine shapes its coastline through pressure, wind, and persistence. God forms resilient faith.**

A lobsterman off the coast of Maine once shared a story with a pastor friend of mine. He had been fishing for decades. One morning, thick fog rolled in so heavily he couldn't see beyond the bow of his boat. His GPS malfunctioned. The radio crackled. He was disoriented. For hours he drifted slowly, resisting panic. Instead of rushing blindly, he did what older fishermen taught him:

He listened. He cut the engine. He watched the tide. He listened for the bell buoy. He felt the wind direction. Eventually he found his bearings and made it safely to harbor.

Later he said: “The fog didn’t teach me anything new — it made me trust what I already knew.” That’s wilderness faith.

The fog reveals whether we trust the Guide. And he added something profound: “You never learn the sea on calm days.”

Beloved, you never learn deep trust in easy seasons.

God Provides in the Wilderness

The wilderness strips away illusions of self-sufficiency. It teaches:

- gratitude over entitlement
- dependence over control
- trust over anxiety

In Maine terms — wilderness faith knows you don’t control the ocean, but you can trust the One who holds it.

Jesus Shows Us How to Walk the Journey In Mark, Jesus faces temptation:

- hunger
- isolation
- testing

Yet God provides.

The wilderness is never empty of God’s presence.

You may feel alone —but God is working, strengthening, preparing.

We all walk wilderness seasons:

- uncertainty about the future
- church transitions and questions
- illness or loss
- cultural change
- spiritual dryness
- No compassion for the poor, struggling working class

Here is the hope of today’s message:

The wilderness is not where God leaves you.

It is where God meets you.

- Israel found provision.
- Jesus found strength.
- We find transformation.

The same Spirit still leads, sustains, and restores.

Life with God is not always a cruise ship in Casco Bay on a sunny afternoon or sitting on the rock ledge on Blue Mountain. Sometimes it’s a small boat in heavy fog, listening for

the bell buoy, trusting the tide, moving slowly forward. But the harbor is real. The Guide, God, is faithful and the journey changes us.

A lifelong Mainer named Earl, to protect his identity, decided he needed a “spiritual retreat.”

Now in Maine, this usually means one of three things:

- going into the woods,
- getting lost in the woods, or
- pretending you meant to get lost in the woods.

Earl chose all three.

He told his pastor, “I’m heading into the wilderness to listen for the Holy Spirit.”

His pastor nodded wisely and said, “Bring extra socks.”

The Wilderness Experience

Earl packed what he considered essential spiritual equipment:

- a Bible
- a thermos of coffee strong enough to wake the dead
- two whoopie pies
- and absolutely no map (because “the Spirit will guide”).

Three hours later, the Spirit apparently guided him straight into a bog.

Boot stuck. Pride wounded. Mosquitoes rejoicing.

Standing knee-deep in mud, Earl prayed his most honest prayer ever:

“Lord... if this is transformation, I’d prefer a different method.”

Exhausted, he wandered until he reached a rocky shore where an old lobster trap had washed up. He sat on it, defeated, wet, and slightly chewed by nature.

That’s when something shifted. The wind quieted. The waves slowed.

A deep stillness settled over him.

And in that silence came a gentle realization:

- He couldn’t control the wilderness.
- He couldn’t force clarity.
- He couldn’t muscle his way to God like fixing an outboard motor.

He later described it simply: “I felt held... like God was saying, ‘Sit down, Earl. I’ve been talking the whole time.’”

And in Maine especially — God often speaks after you sit down, stop talking, and admit you should’ve brought a map.

# Just as I Am

410

1. Just as I am, with - out one plea but that your  
 2. Just as I am, though tossed a - bout with man - y a  
 3. Just as I am, you will re - ceive, will wel - come,  
 4. Just as I am, your love un - known has bro - ken

blood was shed for me, and that you called in -  
 con - flict, many a doubt, fight - ings and fears with -  
 par - don, cleanse, re - lieve; be - cause your prom - ise  
 ev - 'ry bar - rier down; now to be yours, and

vit - ing me, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!  
 in, with - out, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!  
 I be - lieve, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!  
 yours a - lone, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

WORDS: Charlotte Elliott, 1836, alt.  
 MUSIC: William B. Bradbury, 1849

WOODWORTH  
 LM

In this text Elliott, a total invalid, expressed her strong faith in spite of doubt as to her purpose in life. Her words first appeared in *The Invalid's Hymn Book*, 1841, along with the scripture 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.' (John 6:37)

You must give birth to your images.  
 They are the future waiting to be born . . .  
 fear not the strangeness you feel.  
 The future must enter into you long before it happens . . .  
 Just wait for the birth . . .  
 for the hour of new clarity.

— Rainer Maria Rilke, 1875-1926

## Beneath the Cross of Jesus

189

1. Beneath the cross of Jesus  
I fain would take my stand,  
the shadow of a mighty rock  
within a weary land;  
a home within the wilderness,  
a rest upon the way,  
from the burning of the noontide heat,  
and the burden of the day.
2. Upon that cross of Jesus  
mine eye at times can see  
the very dying form of one  
who suffered there for me;  
and from my smitten heart with tears  
two wonders I confess –  
the wonders of his glorious love  
and my unworthiness.
3. I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place;  
I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face;  
content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss,  
my sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross.

WORDS: Elizabeth C. Clephane, 1872  
MUSIC: Frederick C. Maker, 1881

ST. CHRISTOPHER  
76.86.86.86

Elizabeth Clephane was given the name 'Sunbeam' because  
of her work among the poor near Melrose, England.

## When Jesus Wept

190

*May be sung as a round*

① When Je - sus wept, the fall - ing tear in mer - cy

②

③ flowed be - yond all bound; when Je - sus groaned, a

④ trem - bling fear seized all the guilt - y world a - round.

WORDS and MUSIC: William Billings, 1770

WHEN JESUS WEPT  
LM

William Billings, in the Congregational tradition,  
was the first great American singing school master,  
composer and writer of hymns.

*SUFFERING AND DEATH*

# Jesus, Remember Me

198

Je - sus, re - mem - ber me when you come in - to your king - dom.

The first system of music consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The bottom staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The melody is written in the treble staff, and the accompaniment is in the bass staff. The lyrics are placed below the treble staff.

Je - sus, re - mem - ber me when you come in - to your king - dom.

The second system of music consists of two staves, identical in notation to the first system. It includes the same treble and bass staves with lyrics and musical notation.

WORDS: Luke 23:42  
MUSIC: Jacques Berthier and the Taizé Community, 1981

REMEMBER ME  
68.68