

Prayer for Understanding God of abundance, help us be hungry for your good word and thirsty for your living water. Startle us with your grace. Amen.

Lent is the celebration of God transforming us. God is transforming fear to peace, joy and love. The psalmist sings. Psalm 46:Select Verses **“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; God utters God’s voice, the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. “Be still, and know that I am God! The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.**

The Bible says “fear not” 365 times one for each day. Psalm 23:4 (NLT), "Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for You, God, are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me."

Sometimes when the world rapidly changes we hear God’s word to us in new ways. Circling back to the beginning of Lent. We began by acknowledging our mortality, that we are mere dust, that our earthly body is a fragile shell, that was never met to last. We all will die an earthly death. Together we acknowledged our mortality before the coronavirus was in our midst. Life from death is the overarching paradox we are invited to discover during lent. Being aware of our mortality helps us live in the present and be grateful for every moment of earthly life. Being aware that we are dust is the beginning of the story. The end of our earthly story is eternal life from death. Jesus conquered death and rose to eternal life. Jesus’ physical body was buried and returned to dust, yet God resurrected all the goodness, beauty and love of Jesus and gave Jesus a new glorious resurrection body. God promises that love in every form never ends. All

the love you give and receive is eternal. One day each of us will enjoy our perfect, eternal resurrection body and the love of God and everyone in heaven. We are someplace between dust and heaven.

When earthly death was imminent for Jesus, he said. John 14:Select Verses **“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in God’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way to where I am going. I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid. Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. I have told you these things before they happen so that when they do happen, you will believe.”**

We are able to have peace in the face of earthly death because death is a portal to perfect glorious resurrection life. Currently the entire world is in the wilderness. We do not know the future; we do not know where we can buy toilet paper. There are no paths or oases in the wilderness. When we are dumped in the wilderness the first temptation is to forget our identity. All of us, everyone, is God’s beloved child. All of us have the eternal power of God with us, the compassion of God who wipes away every tear with us. There is absolutely nothing that can separate us from God’s love. Coronavirus cannot separate us from God’s love. Romans 8:35-39 NLT **“Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean God no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, “For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”) No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loves us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,**

neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

In the wilderness we are tempted to forget our identity, who we truly are. No one is created with fear, worry, hate, anxiety, brokenness, longing, incompleteness these are all aspects of our fleeting dust mortality. All of us are created with love, peace, joy, creativeness, abilities, talents, wonder and beauty. Being in the wilderness makes our journey difficult and arduous however nothing changes about who each of us is, a beloved, magnificent child of God. We are going to be silent for a minute. If you have fears and worries imagine yourself handing them over to Jesus. Once all your fears and worries are gone think about your wonderful qualities. *Silence* Amen

In the wilderness we are tempted to think only about our survival, our family’s survival. Jesus was tempted to turn a stone into a single loaf of bread to meet his personal immediate hunger. Jesus is the bread of life for all people for eternity. Before all of us were dumped in the wilderness by coronavirus there were people already in the wilderness perhaps by unemployment, a broken relationship, an accident, cancer and on and on. Because of coronavirus some of us are deeper in the wilderness than others, sudden loss of income, athletic dream shattered, physical isolation, those who suffer from depression, anxiety. These people still need our compassion. Many of us currently have more free time to call and listen, to write a letter, send a card. During your wilderness times you likely had someone help you. How will you help others?

Fear, selfishness, isolation is a toxic combination that often leads to judging and blaming others. Each person reacts to the wilderness in a different way. Please do not judge anyone, their behaviors or reactions. Please refrain from blaming others, racism, agism. We are all in this together. Judging or blaming helps no one get through the wilderness faster. All of us are hurting. Remember their identity, your sibling, a beloved

child of God. Remember your identity a loving, caring, compassionate, creative, talented, gifted wonderful child of God designed to lovingly help everyone through the wilderness. God gives each of us an infinite supply of love and joy to share with everyone.

In the wilderness we are with each other. We need empathy for each other. Brene Brown tells us how.

Show video

God is like the bear. God climbed down out of heaven in Jesus to be with us, to listen to us, to take on our pain, suffering and struggle. God is always with us. God always remains connected to us. God transforms us, heals us, perfects us.

The prophet Isaiah declares. **Isaiah 41:10 “Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.**

We will all get through the wilderness together. Easter is coming. God has already resurrected every instance of love, joy and goodness you have experienced. We will all be resurrected and enjoy eternal life where we savor all the love and joy of every person for eternity. Love and joy will expand for all of us forever. Nothing, not coronavirus, or anything can take that away.

The beginning of our story is dust. One day each of us will journey through the portal of death to glorious eternal life. In this in between time we have the opportunity to forgive, mend, heal, to transform. We have the opportunity to create beauty, laugh, rejoice, dance, play, love ourselves, love each other, develop harmonious community, to be and do things beyond our grandest imagination. We have the opportunity to savor goodness, be in wonder, to bring the glory of heaven to earth.

We will get through the wilderness together. Even in the wilderness the sunrises every day. A sign that God is constantly dispersing every form of darkness with gracious light. Every day is a fresh start, a new opportunity to give and receive love and

joy. Jesus came to fill us with abundant life. Jesus came to fill us with joy and make our joy complete.

Most of us currently have more free time. Time to listen and talk as a family, do a puzzle, play a board game, do an in-house scavenger hunt, cook meals together, look through pictures together, share stories. If you know of someone who is alone, call them, video call them, play a virtual game, write a card to them. Gather around a screen and take a virtual tour of a museum or national park, talk about what you see. Make a gratitude list of things and people that fill you with joy. You are creative find new ways to share love, to laugh, to rejoice together. Amen