

## INVITED TO WANDER

Luke 4:1-13  
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Community Church, Congregational  
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He led a comfortable life, even if it was a bit boring. He enjoyed good food, good wine, good friends, and his position as one of the wealthiest and most prestigious men in his community. He loved reading and learning, and could immerse himself for hours studying whatever text was before him or simply gazing at the stars above and wondering at the immensity of the heavens. But then one evening, an old wanderer knocked on the door and invited him on a new adventure. It wasn't quite as dramatic as the Spirit sending Jesus into the wilderness, but it was an opportunity to embark on an exciting journey. "No, no, no," he said. "We're quite comfortable here." He planned to stay home – no wandering in the wilderness for him; it was the safe decision to stay home – no devils, no dragons, no demons at home. But as the wanderer and other wandering friends dropped by, the stories of people he'd never met, lands he'd never seen, and adventures he'd never known began to take root in his mind. When they left the next morning, he felt strangely sad, even as he was relieved to see them go their way. He would always have their stories as he gazed at the stars at night. He would always have the invitation, should he ever change his mind. But that morning, he chose the familiar path and stayed right where he was.

Each time we open scripture, each time we offer a prayer, and even each time we gaze at the heavens, an invitation awaits: an invitation to wander into lands we've never known, get to know people we've never met, and be part of new journeys, even adventures. Long before the Spirit sent Jesus to wander in the wilderness, the people of God have been wanderers, beginning in the book of Genesis. One of Genesis's prime characters, Abraham received an invitation to "*Invited to Wander*" ~ Luke 4:1-13 © 2018 Mary Scifres ~ [www.maryscifres.com](http://www.maryscifres.com)

wander – several, in fact. God invited him to leave his homeland behind, and embark on a journey to a new land. Then, God invited him to trust in an absurd promise that he would be the father of nations, when Abraham seemed unable to father even one child. In his old age, a group of angels stopped by, promising an heir to begin an ancestry more numerous than the stars. Each time, Abraham accepted the invitation to wander into unknown lands, to meet new people, and to embark on ever-expanding journeys with God.

After Jesus' baptism, the Spirit sends him out into the wilderness to wander, and in this wandering he meets a new person, a person scripture calls Satan, but perhaps the Satan of this story is no different than the demons that reside within each of us. This companion on Jesus' journey invites him to return to old, familiar patterns. Use your power for your own benefit – to rule over others, show off for others, and even prove to others how great you are. That's a familiar story. People the world over have been using power like this since time began.

[Nothing new and unfamiliar there. Use God's protection to save yourself. You're the most powerful person in the world; how about you just conquer everyone with God's righteousness. You're the most miraculous person the world will ever know, how about if you just create bread and feed millions with your miraculous abilities? You're God's precious child, how about just proving to the world how faithful God is by throwing yourself from a roof and trusting God to save you?]

But Jesus chooses a different path to travel the journey God has invited him on – a journey of serving others, a journey of loving the least and the last, a journey of forgiving and accepting, and ultimately a journey to the cross. Each year, for the 6 weeks leading up to Easter, Christians the world over are invited onto this journey with Jesus, a journey to the cross, in a season we call "Lent." Today's scripture invites us to wander through this season, to listen for *"Invited to Wander" ~ Luke 4:1-13 © 2018 Mary Scifres ~ www.maryscifres.com*

the invitations that God sends our way through scripture, prayer, conversation, study, meditation, and worship. It may be tempting to ignore this invitation like the man in our earlier story; after all, many of us lead very safe lives. At the very least, we're familiar with the lives we lead. But when we allow ourselves to journey with God, we open ourselves to the growth and change that God offers for our lives.

When we wander along unfamiliar wilderness paths, we can meet new people, even the new person inside each and every one of us who is yearning to emerge. We can wander to new lands, perhaps the new landscape within our very hearts and souls. In the wandering, we may meet our inner demons. We may face some hard temptations that would send us away from God's invitation to grow and evolve on the path toward the cross. But God will be with us on the journey, helping us to stand strong in the face of such temptation, encouraging us to bravely go where we have not yet gone before. And in the going, in the wandering, in the journey, we can grow as we allow God's Spirit to grow within us, growing ever stronger, and guiding us ever more steadfastly to answer God's call as faithfully as Abraham did, even as faithfully as Jesus did.

But we won't ever get there if we just keep doing the same things over and over again. This is as true for a church as it is for individuals. I work with churches all over the world that are struggling or in crisis; each one of these churches, just like ours, faces that temptation to just do the same old things they've always done and just try to do them better, hoping for different results. It those same old things that get us in trouble in the first place. Sometimes, you have to wander on a different path, listen for God's invitation to do things differently. Otherwise, it's kind of liking going to McDonald's every day for lunch and thinking, "Well if I just choose the healthy items today, I'll finally get healthy again." It's the going to that same familiar place

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that's probably causing the high cholesterol; there just aren't that many good choices there.

No matter who we are or where we are on life's journey, if we're still on this earth, we've still got wandering to do. We've still got growing to do. We still have changing to do. Last time I checked, the earth still wasn't perfect and neither was I. So, I've still some got some wandering ahead of me. Open up your scripture and read a section you've never read, and listen for what new messages God has to offer to you in those unfamiliar words. Never read scripture? Pick up the Gospel of Mark, and just read the first chapter. It won't even take you five minutes. Then just sit still, and think about what you've read: who you met in those two pages of scripture; what lands you wandered as you read their stories; who in those pages might be like you. You might just hear an invitation to embark on a new journey. If reading isn't your thing, you can listen to someone read scripture for you on-line.

Or, let prayer into your life, perhaps for the first time or perhaps in a new way after many years of doing it the same way over and over again. If you're used to talking to God when you pray, try just listening silently, deeply, waiting for the Spirit to nudge you, or even speak to you. If you're used to listening quietly without words, try speaking your thoughts to God. Wander through the mystery of prayer, and see what invitation comes your way.

This season of Lent begins officially on Wednesday, and in some traditions, the pastor might ask you to give something up for Lent. But I invite you to add something in for these next six weeks. Add some wandering. Wander through scripture you've never explored, or wander through prayers you've not yet experienced; wander on a beach and listen as the waves speak to you; or wander under the stars and let your heart give thanks to God for the immensity of this universe.

You may be tempted to just continue doing what you've always done, but I invite you to  
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wander as Jesus wandered and even take an unfamiliar path, as Robert Frost once spoke of doing:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

....

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.<sup>1</sup>

Oh, and by the way, the guy in my story who stayed behind when his wandering friends went on their adventure, he only stayed behind for an hour or so that morning. Ended up, he didn't even pack – just grabbed a walking stick and a hat and ran after a group of dwarves and a wizard named Gandalf to go on his adventure as a hobbit, a hobbit who would begin the journey of saving Middle Earth, because he had the courage to walk out his front door and leave the familiar behind. When devout Catholic J. R. R. Tolkien wrote “The Hobbit” and later his entire “Lord of the Rings” trilogy, he wasn't just writing of an imaginary land called Middle Earth; he was writing of the very real land called the human journey, a journey where wandering into new lands with new people and new ideas and new growth can not only save us, even save our world.

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<sup>1</sup> Frost, Robert. Excerpt from “The Road Not Taken,” *Mountain Interval*, ©1916, 1921 Henry Holt Publishers.

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