
2020 LENT DEVOTIONAL

A Sanctified Art LLC is a collective of artists in ministry who create resources for worshiping communities. The Sanctified Art team works collaboratively to bring scripture and theological themes to life through film, visual art, curriculum, coloring pages, liturgy, graphic designs, and more. Their mission is to empower churches with resources to inspire creativity in worship and beyond. Driven by the connective and prophetic power of art, they believe that art helps us connect our hearts with our hands, our faith with our lives, and our mess with our God.

Learn more about their work at sanctifiedart.org.

Wilderness



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ART, POETRY, &
PROMPTS FOR THE
WILDERNESS OF LENT



Artist Bios

REV. LISLE GWYNN GARRITY FOUNDER | CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Lisle (she/her/hers) is a Pastorist (pastor + artist), retreat leader, and creative entrepreneur seeking to fill the church with more color, paint, mystery, and creativity. A graduate of Davidson College, where she majored in English (and unofficially minored in visual art), Lisle also completed Master's degrees in Divinity and Practical Theology (with a concentration in worship). Serving the Church at-large, Lisle travels widely to share her gifts as an artist and pastor. She founded *A Sanctified Art* with the conviction that, in order to thrive, the Church needs more creative expression and art-filled freedom.

REV. LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN DIRECTOR OF BRANDING | FOUNDING CREATIVE PARTNER

Lauren (she/her/hers) is an artist, graphic designer, and theologian. She studied Media Design at Middle Tennessee State University, worked as a wetlands advocate in Southern Louisiana, and went to seminary to piece together her passions for artistic expression, design, and creation care. While in seminary, Lauren found her voice in seeking after God through visual exploration. She uses paint, metallic inks, and Apple pencil to image the layered complexity she experiences in scripture texts. She also helps faith communities share their vibrant stories through branding & design services.

HANNAH GARRITY | FOUNDING CREATIVE PARTNER

Hannah (she/her/hers) is an artist and an athlete, a daughter and a mother, a facilitator and a producer, a leader and a teammate. Her hobbies and her professions are one and the same. The joy in her life is deep and wide. Trained in art at Cornell University, in teaching at Pace University, in reformed theology through her work at the Montreat Conference Center, Hannah is called by God to blend her talents. She is an art teacher at a middle school in Richmond, VA, a Sunday school visual choir facilitator at Second Presbyterian Church in Richmond, VA, an art in worship workshop leader wherever she is called, and a liturgical installation artist at the Montreat Conference Center, Montreat, NC.

REV. SARAH ARE | FOUNDING CREATIVE PARTNER

Sarah (she/her/hers) is the Associate Pastor for Youth and Young Adults at Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church, Dallas, Texas. She graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a degree in Social Work, and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Columbia Theological Seminary. Sarah loves to combine her love of all things creative with her passion for God. She believes that the Church has a responsibility to open every door to God, so that those of us who are visual, kinesthetic, or relational learners all have equal opportunity to engage God to the fullest of our abilities.

Easter Sunday | APRIL 12

READ PSALM 46

FROM THE ARTIST | LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

The wilderness of grief has brought her here—to this cave of stones arranged to hold the dead. Here where her weeping gives way to awe. Here where her worst fear and wildest dream collide. Here where the wilderness breaks open with the empty tomb.

What, now?

In the quiet of the dawn, Mary sips in a deep breath. Perhaps as she steps away, Psalm 46 becomes her prayer.

Inhale. Be still and know that I am God.

Exhale. Be still and know.

Inhale. Be still.

Exhale. Be.

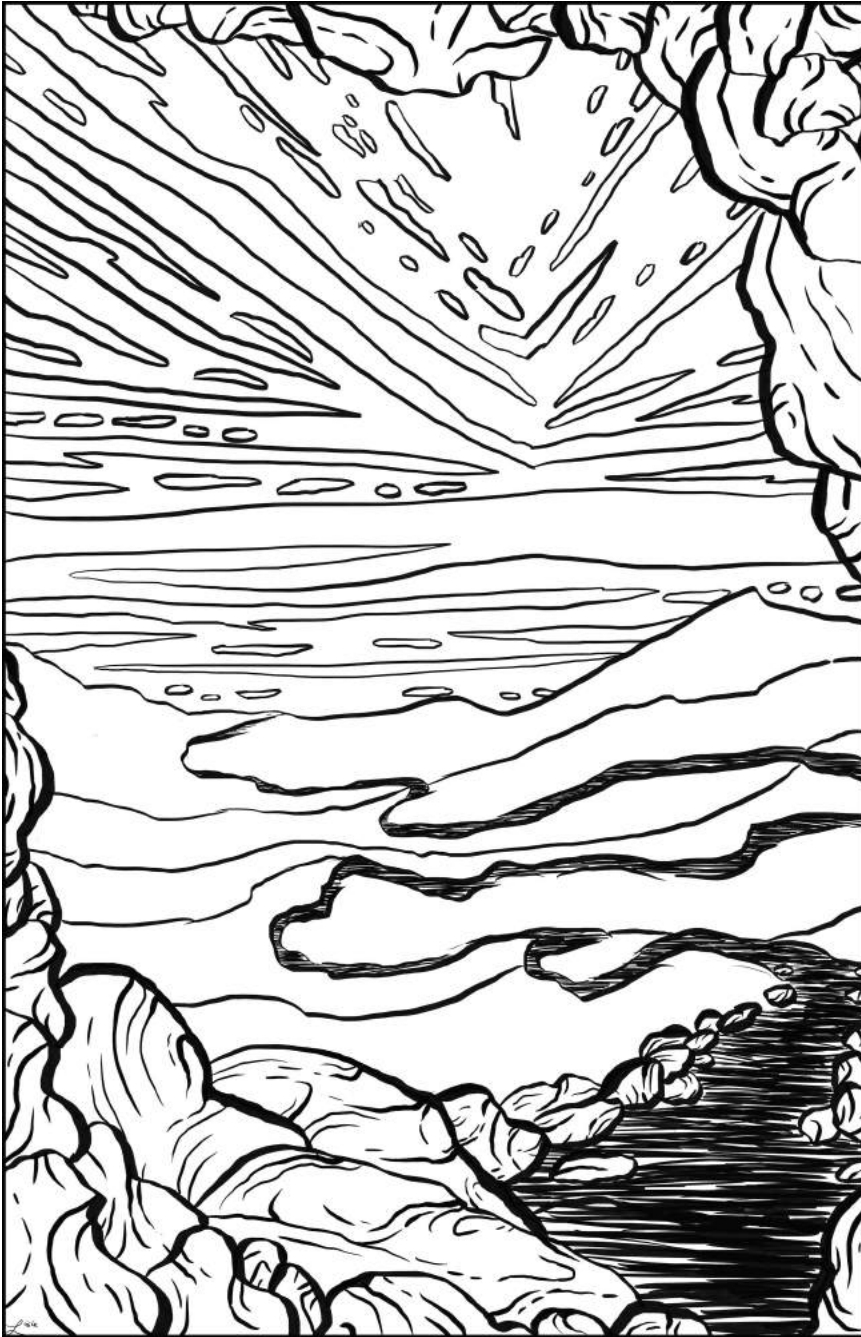
Inhale.

Begin again. The sun is rising for you.¹

PRAYER

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.

1 This is a line from Sarah Are's poem, "The Wilderness is a place of beginnings" found on page 5 of this devotional.



Be Still | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Wilder • ness
“state of the wild”

Lent begins in the wilderness. The Spirit guides Jesus into the wilderness where he comes face to face with temptation and struggle. Yet, in his forty days of fasting, resisting, and wandering, Jesus is shaped and formed for ministry. Similarly, through the wilderness of Lent, we are invited to surrender to the wild leadings of the Spirit. We rarely enter the wilderness willingly, but hopefully through our wandering we remember who we are and whose we are. The wilderness can become sacred even if it remains dangerous. There is no wilderness space too harsh or threatening for God’s love.

We encourage you to walk through these weekly readings and prompts at your own pace throughout the season of Lent. May the art, reflections, poetry, and journaling allow you to wander and wonder your way through the wilderness.

In the wilderness our faith is born, nurtured, challenged, and resurrected. May it be so for you this season.

Artfully yours,

The Sanctified Art Creative Team

Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Sarah Are

Hannah Garrity

Lauren Wright Pittman

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Easter Sunday | APRIL 12

READ JOHN 20:1-18

FROM THE ARTIST | LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

Each person engages the tomb to different degrees. Mary sees the stone missing from the tomb and runs to share what she's seen. The unnamed disciple bends down, looks into the tomb, and sees strips of linen, but does not enter. Peter enters the tomb immediately and sees the linen wrappings and Jesus' head cloth. The unnamed disciple enters after Peter and believes, though his belief is unclear. It seems each person's knowledge builds, but understanding isn't realized.

The disciples return home, but Mary chooses to stay in the midst of this nightmare. Through tear-filled eyes, Mary chooses to remain present and to see.

As the morning's darkness shifts into hues of dancing light, Mary sees two angels whose brilliance cracks the tomb's darkness. They interrupt the sounds of her sorrow, asking an absurd question at the mouth of her friend's empty tomb: "Woman, why are you weeping?" As she explains to the bright figures the source of her tears, a strange man repeats the question. She turns and sees him, but still does not understand. When the man exclaims, "Mary!" the emptiness of the tomb becomes fullness.

If we take time in the disorienting, wilderness moments of our lives, choosing to see everything for what it is instead of running away, our perspective can change, and we open ourselves to miracles. Mary planted herself in the wilderness and saw the horror of an empty tomb transform into the most saturated image of hope. Jesus is unbound, alive, and everywhere, and she becomes the original bearer of this Good News. When we choose to endure the wilderness, we have the opportunity to recognize and receive the gifts the wilderness has to offer us, and to go out to share it with others.

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Fullness of the Tomb | Lauren Wright Pittman

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Poem on Wilderness

THE WILDERNESS IS SOMEWHERE
WE'VE BEEN BEFORE

I'm not the first.
That's what I tell myself when I
wake up in the wilderness—
Big sky, worried heart,
wondering which way to start.
I have been here before.
We have been here before.
For as long as there has
been creation,
There has been wilderness.

First it was an endless void,
Until God and God's paintbrush
painted the sky gold.
And then it was all that lies
east of Eden,
Which is everywhere that our
story unfolds.

So like a child memorizing
their home address,
You'd think I'd learn my way
out of this wilderness.
But like the Israelites who
wandered for forty plus years,
I think I'll spend most of my
day to day here.
For the wilderness is
everywhere that I start
to grow.
Cracks in the sidewalk, daisies
take hold.
And the wilderness is every
single place of unknown,
Or when shame and fear move
into my home.

And the wilderness is where
dusty feet tread,
Familiar with the truth that we
have days left.

So where is God, you ask?

God is in the big sky and in my
worried heart.

God is the sidewalk cracks
where new life starts.

God is in the realization that I
am not the first.

So may we take these limited
days left

And remember that we've been
here before—

God and I and this untamed
world.

God and the Israelites and the
gathered assembly.

God and the horizon and the
new day beginning.

Prayer by Sarah Are

Journaling & Reflection

THE WILDERNESS IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF JOY

When and where have you found God in the wilderness?

[illegible]

Poem on Wilderness

THE WILDERNESS IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF JOY

I used to know the wilderness only as pain;
A land without food, a land without water.

But you rained down manna
And even water flows in your desert.

I used to think the wilderness was total isolation—
But the Israelites had each other,
And you had the stars in the sky.

So then I thought the wilderness must be time wasted—
Forty years of circles.
Forty years of wondering.
But then I realized, each step is a step,
And maybe there's growth in that.

So then I concluded that the wilderness must be lonely spaces—
The woman and her well,
The blind man and his gate,
Martha and her kitchen,
Peter and his fire.
But then you showed up in each of those places,
To each of those faces.

So now I wonder—
 What if the wilderness is the birthplace of creation?
 What if the wilderness is where call begins?
 What if the wilderness is where joy is birthed?
 What if, between the dirt and the sky
 And that wide orange horizon,
 The wilderness is where we find you?

Prayer by Sarah Are

2.26- 2.29

Journaling & Reflection

THE WILDERNESS IS SOMEWHERE WE'VE BEEN BEFORE

What does the wilderness look and feel like to you?

In the space below, name the different types of wilderness you've encountered and endured.

[illegible]



Day of the Lord | Hannah Garrity

READ JOHN 13:1-17, 31B-35

FROM THE ARTIST | LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

When I was in high school, my pastor washed my feet during a Maundy Thursday service. I felt a wide range of emotions throughout the experience, but what feels most important is how differently I felt before and after having my feet washed. I stood in line with my feet bound in boots while self-conscious thoughts filled my mind. "What if my feet stink?" "What if my toenails aren't cut?" "What if my feet are blistered and rough to the touch?" I didn't want my pastor to have to touch my feet. The thing was, he didn't have to. He humbled himself in response to Jesus' example.

Once Jesus finishes washing the disciples' feet, enduring their protest and misunderstanding, he says, "You also ought to wash one another's feet." I imagine Jesus splashing around in the water to image the resulting ripples of his action. Jesus sees this moment as a center point of change. If each of the twelve understood and humbled themselves in service to others, and the recipients of their kindness did the same, the ripples of impact would be unending.

In this mandala, I imaged each of the disciples turned outward, washing another's feet with dandelions framing their hands. When you blow on a dandelion, the seeds drift in the wind, rest, take root, and multiply. For me, Jesus' actions mimic this progression. The seeds he plants in their hearts would take flight and root, spreading the good news ultimately to you and me. As my pastor washed my feet, I was overcome with gratitude and conviction. Tears poured down my face as he knelt and carefully rubbed my feet. My self-consciousness dissolved into other-consciousness. If my pastor could do this for me, I could certainly go and do likewise.

PRAYER

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.

READ JOEL 2:1-2, 12-17

FROM THE ARTIST | HANNAH GARRITY

God calls us home. In this image I imagined God weeping for our return, calling out to his children, “Come home to me. I love you.” Specifically, I am “abounding in steadfast love,” says the Lord (Joel 2:13).

In verse 11, Joel mentions, “numberless are those who obey his command.” In churches that are shrinking, how can we reach people to call them home? Our congregations are often small and mighty. In this prophecy, God knows that his children are rushing toward him, doing his work. But now, how are people’s souls being fed? Where are they on Sunday? How can we reach them without having them in the pews? What are the ideals of the church structure? How can they be met in a different format?

Or shall we wait a moment, steadfast in our structure, until we can see the people that God already sees?

How can churches connect with people who have never walked through their doors? What is a way to amplify this message of steadfast love? Who needs to know? How can we connect with people who need to know? How can we promote the precious information that God loves his people and is calling them to a life of service through him?

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Drifting Seeds | Lauren Wright Pittman

Poem on Wilderness

THE WILDERNESS IS A PLACE OF BEGINNINGS

“Begin again,” life whispered in my ear;
For some days are beginning days.

Some days are designed to be the day we try again,
And on those days—the sun rises for you.
On those days, the birds sing for you.
On those days, God is cheering for you.
That’s just the way God and beginnings work.

For when your heart is broken and your life is in pieces,
Or when the addiction or the depression have found their way back
into your bones,
Or when you lose sight of the person that you were called to be,
The wilderness will sing to you, “Begin again.”

“Begin again” with the person you want to be.
“Begin again” with the person you want to love.
“Begin again” with the knowledge of your faith.
“Begin again.”

The sun is rising for you.

Prayer by Sarah Are

READ MATTHEW 21:1-11

FROM THE ARTIST | HANNAH GARRITY

Jerusalem is the daughter of Zion. In her we see overlaid intricacies of architecture and city planning. The beauty of her people. The layout of her family tree. The importance of her lineage. The repetition of her ancient stories. The importance of her prophets. The telling of true, right, and good. The incredible way that we live into our story, into God’s story.

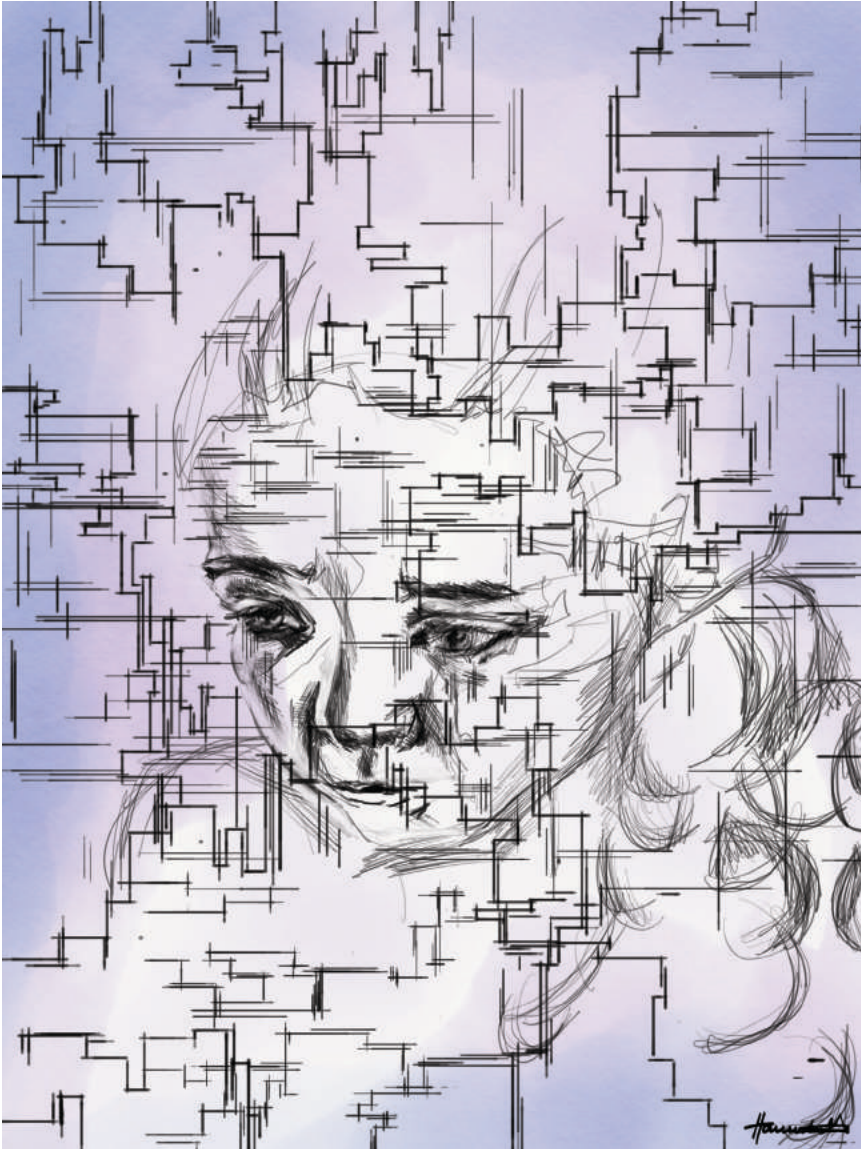
Here in Matthew, as Jesus prepares to arrive in Jerusalem to lay down his life for God’s children, he harkens back to the past. He recalls a simple prophecy, repeated over the generations, taught, and retaught. He must have the donkey and her colt in order to fully live into the story that had been prepared for him by God.

In this image, I drew repetitive angles as a layer of architecture, a suggestion of lineage, as the repetition of a path through time. I imagine that the architecture of a city and lineage of a people are related. Jesus quotes the prophets and acts on their words. Behind the patterns of prophecy is a daughter. I portrayed her in a pose of listening, memorizing, preparing to retell the story. I drew her as thoughtful and contemplative, aware that her future role is to pass the narrative. She will tell of a peasant king’s call to love and fearlessness.

PRAYER

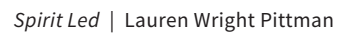
Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

Identify something in your life that is beginning or just get started—a new job, a new relationship, a new chapter, a new interest. What is your prayer for this beginning?

[illegible]

37 | SANCTIFIED ART WILDERNESS DEVOTIONAL | HOLY WEEK

Name times in your life when you have confronted fear with courage. What actions feel like bravery for you?

[illegible]

Poem on Wilderness

THE WILDERNESS IS A PLACE
WHERE WE ARE BRAVE

First, we have to name it—
The heartbreak,
The addiction,
The shame,
The grief.

Whatever your wilderness is,
First we have to name it.

And once we've said those
words out loud,
We let that truth hang in the air.
And we let ourselves feel what
we feel,
For in this moment,
we are close to the surface.

And after a few deep breaths,
We begin the removing.
Piece by piece, we take our
armour off,
For truth-telling days are
Soft skin kind of days.

And once we are armour-free,
Hearts on our sleeves
And tears in our throats,
We stand toe-to-toe
With the very hurt that
wrecked us.
And we don't try to swallow
that pain away.

And there,
In all our beautiful God-given
honesty,
We say to that monster,
"I have love on my side,
And her name is God,
And no wilderness can
separate me
From that north star."
And I believe
It will be the bravest thing you
ever do.
And your knees might shake,
And you might lose your way,
But our God is a God of
second chances,
So take my hand.
You are close to the surface.
Let's be brave together.

Prayer by Sarah Are

READ MATTHEW 4:1-11

FROM THE ARTIST | LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

I depicted Jesus divided, containing in his divinity all the stars and galaxies of the universe on the left, and the layered dust of his humanity on the right. For me, this text highlights the tension held within Jesus' identity, particularly through the tempter's efforts to lead Jesus toward his human nature while betraying his divinity. If Jesus were to succumb to the tempter's requests, he would have access to the unlimited power, influence, and riches the world has to offer, which are referenced by the stacked, columned structures on the right side of the image. If Jesus chooses to resist the temptations and stay planted in the wilderness, honoring his divinity and call, he chooses the wilderness path—one that would ultimately lead to his demise.

Jesus' ministry is defined by this standoff with the tempter. He is asked to turn stones into bread; instead he goes on to share meals with those deemed unworthy, and miraculously shares two loaves of bread with five thousand people. He is asked to stand on the pinnacle of the church and enlist the help of angels; instead he goes on to turn over tables protesting the temple's entanglement with capitalism and greed. He is asked to take his place as earthly ruler over all; instead he will take the shape of a servant, dying a state-sanctioned death.

Jesus is led by the Spirit *into* the wilderness immediately after being baptized. The wilderness has something to offer Jesus, and instead of taking a detour around it, he chooses to encounter its lessons. When we find ourselves in the wilderness places of life, may we take an open, curious posture, ready to be challenged, shaped, and sent.

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

READ EZEKIEL 37:1-14

FROM THE ARTIST | LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

I grew up and live in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Almost all of the time, the woodsy wilderness is a place of retreat and restoration for me. I love the smell of trails laden with soggy leaves. I will never tire of seeing mountains crowned with morning mist. I feel most at ease with a purple ridgeline in view—from office windows, or traffic stop lights. And yet, there is a place in my geographical wilderness that haunts me.

To get to it, you have to drive down a gravel road that cuts deep into the valley that eventually flattens into the foothills. The gravel road lowers in elevation with every switchback, dropping you into the belly of the mountains. The valley is mostly empty, besides a few wooded homes. An old railroad, carved through stone and hillside, snakes through the rise and fall of the land. The railroad was built hazardously, through dynamite blasts and hand-dug tunnels, by five hundred prisoners and slaves in the late 1800s. Nearly a hundred and twenty of the workers died in the process.

The place I visit is an old logging road off the gravel way, now a wide walking path used mostly by bear hunters and lone hikers like me. The path meanders and eventually opens to a mountain view. Not long ago, heavy rains and landslides reshaped the mountainside into a graveyard of leaning trees and displaced earth. Sticks and broken limbs litter the ground, dry as bones. The wind carries the echoes of the past, of lives lost and workers abused. Here, the wilderness tells the story of death and decay.

Can these bones live?

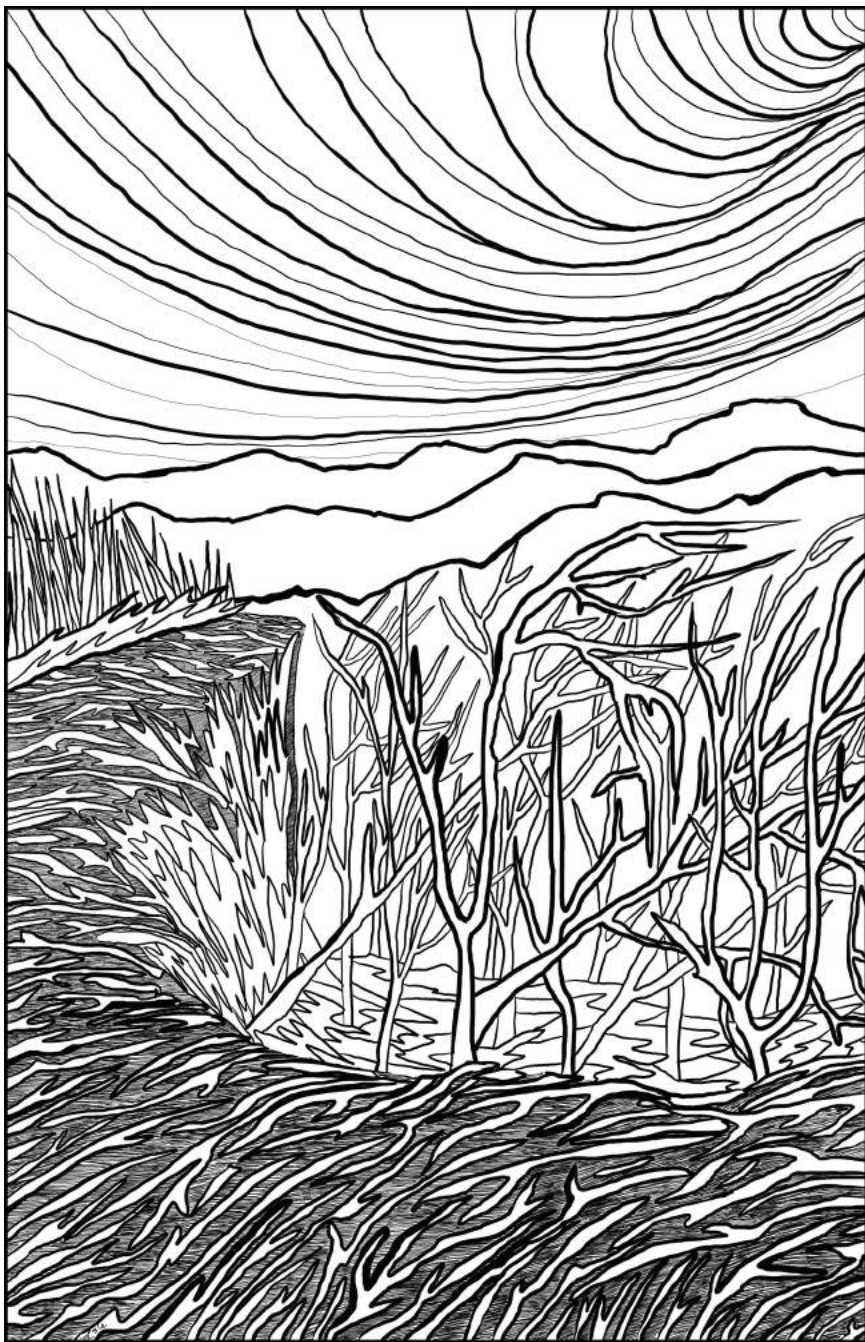
Staring into the valley of dry bones, I am stirred by the sight and convicted by the question.

PRAYER

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Synapses | Hannah Garrity



Valley of Dry Bones | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

First Week of Lent | MARCH 1-7

READ GENESIS 2:15-17; 3:1-7

FROM THE ARTIST | HANNAH GARRITY

In this art piece, I imagined an apple picked from the tree—an apple, like the one on a teacher’s desk. The apple itself breaks the border of its frame like the knowledge of good and evil broke the barriers set by God. Within the apple, synapses get more and more dense as the eye moves left to right.

When my son was little I remember seeing a searing image on a poster at a doctor’s office. There were a few brain scans. One was of an infant at birth. Then there were a couple of scans of brains that were a few months old. The newborn’s brain was spacious; the visual appeared to me like a blank canvas. The brains of the babies that were older showed a vast shift. One was significantly more full than the other. In my recollection, the poster was promoting talking and reading to your little ones. The fuller scans showed children who had been exposed to more words. Having taught school for many years, my reaction was visceral. We do not have much time, I thought.

As Adam and Eve began their journey into the world, away from Eden, I imagine that their brains continued to fill with connections, building knowledge. Does the knowledge of good and evil subject us to social vulnerabilities like judgment, ridicule, intimidation? Does our awareness of good and evil set us up for divisiveness? We cannot strive for less awareness. Like Adam and Eve, we innately yearn for more. In this age of constant information flow, our temptation to read only what we agree with looms like the forbidden fruit in Eden. Serpents are lurking. Yet the truth is discernible. We all know good from evil.

PRAYER

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist’s statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.

Poem on Wilderness

THE WILDERNESS IS A PLACE OF
MYSTERY & THE UNKNOWN

It's only in the wilderness that you can see the stars.
That's what city living has taught me.
We can shine a light on the things we want to see—
Fluorescent and bright, lighting up dark alleys.
However, it's only in the wilderness that you can see the stars.

And it's only in the dark of night that the questions come.
What is my purpose here? What does God have to say to me?
What does God have to say to suffering?
The sun falls and my doubt rises,
For it's only in the dark that the questions come.

So like Nicodemus in the night,
I will throw my big questions at the sky.
And my voice will reverberate among the stars,
And my questions will echo throughout the dark.
For there in the night, my words form constellations.
And there in the wilderness, my prayers form galaxies.
So even there in the unknown, I trust that I am found.

A light shines in the darkness, friend.
So if ever you're in the wilderness,
Look up and find the stars.

Prayer by Sarah Are

READ JOHN 11:1-45

FROM THE ARTIST | LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

Jesus' humanity is apparent in this narrative. Here is a greatly disturbed man convincing himself of God's providence as he bears guilt and grieves the loss of his close friend: "I thank you for having heard me. I knew you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here so that they may believe that you sent me" (John 11:42). *Or so that I may believe*, I imagine Jesus thinking.

I imaged Jesus in sorrowful hues, tearfully imploring his friend to come out, while the crowd bears down on his shoulders. Perhaps things got too real. Did he feel the creeping chills of his own fate while standing at the mouth of the tomb? Did he feel responsible?

Jesus seems bound by the weight of his divinity and the demands of his ministry. "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you" (John 11:8). "Lord if you had been there, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21, 32). "Could not this man who opened the blind man's eyes, have done something to keep Lazarus from dying?" (John 11:37). I wonder if as Jesus exclaims, "Unbind him, and let him go," he thinks to himself, "Who will unbind me?"

No matter our vocation, we can find comfort that even Jesus felt overwhelmed by the gravity of his call. When we stumble under this great weight, God strains and weeps with us, but also longs for us to be set free from the pressure. God accompanies us with open hands, ready to unbind us as we learn to lean in confidence on God's provision. We've got to be unbound in order to release others from that which keeps us in spiritual death—that which obscures and steals abundant life.

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

3.08-3.14

Journaling & Reflection

THE WILDERNESS IS A PLACE OF
MYSTERY & THE UNKNOWN

Name something in your life that is covered with questions and uncertainty. What helps you navigate the unknown?

[illegible]

Unbind Me | Lauren Wright Pittman

Journaling & Reflection

What seeds planted in your wilderness have grown into a garden? What are the seeds you are planting now that you pray will one day bloom?

[illegible]

Poem on Wilderness

THE WILDERNESS IS A PLACE OF
NEW LIFE—RESILIENT LIFE

I used to think the wilderness
would never end.

I called my mom and asked—
“Does time really heal
all wounds?”

Do the pieces ever fall back
into place?

Does the wilderness go
on forever?”

So she told me about
the horizon.

She said, “There is an edge,
Where the earth meets the sky.
And when you’re there,
You will see daisies in
the sidewalk
And the sun after the rain.”

I asked her to draw me a map
And she cried,
Because she knew this road was
mine to walk,
But she promised to wait
for me,
Day in and day out,
For as long as the wilderness
raged.

So I walked.

And it felt like forty days and it
hurt like forty nights.

And I waved to the people I
passed there in the
wilderness.

We tipped our hats to
one another,

Silently recognizing the weight
we each carried,
Until one day, I realized—
The earth always kisses the sky.
And this wilderness has turned
into a garden,
And I have made it out alive.

And my mother hugged me,
There at the earth’s edge.
And she whispered in my ear,
That God was that gardener,
And that I had nothing to fear.

So if you ever ask for a map,
Know that God and I will be
planting seeds,
Hoping to turn your wilderness
into a garden.

For as long as the wilderness
rages on,
I will never stop looking for you
Where the earth kisses the sky.

Prayer by Sarah Are

READ JOHN 3:1-17

FROM THE ARTIST | HANNAH GARRITY

I could not see the forest for the trees. My child-bearing years were a time of wilderness for me. Having been a successful student, I looked for measurables to track my failures and successes as a young mother. I read books, talked to friends, compared stories, and mentally tracked what worked and what did not with my little one. I struggled mightily with the fact that my measurable failures significantly outweighed my successes. I have since reimagined how I measure success and failure. Looking back, however, I can see that I was lost in the details. I was mired in measurables while I needed to be open to enjoying the fleeting days of babyhood. I could not enjoy those precious moments of infancy. I just remember babies crying, unable to comfort them. Each subsequent year has presented an onslaught of detail, so many that I have had to restructure my approach to my daily life. This shift has allowed me to move into a realm that is more like this idea that Jesus mentions in John 3:5-8: the idea of being born of the Spirit. It is not a profession of faith that allows one to live like the wind. Plenty of people who believe do not live such a life. Rather, it is a moment-by-moment intention to be aware of God’s presence. It is a minute-by-minute appreciation for the amazing life we have been given. It is a deep breath and a slower-paced walk. It is a freedom unparalleled. It is an ability to see the forest and the trees. This space in the Spirit is deep and wide. It is fleeting and ever-present. Come, live a life born of the Spirit.

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

READ PSALM 23

FROM THE ARTIST | SARAH ARE

Psalm 23 is one of the most well-known scriptures in the bible. We read it at funerals, in worship, and in our own devotional practices. We read it so often that if we're not careful, this text could become nothing more than muscle memory.

However, at my core, I believe that the wilderness provides an opportunity for us to declare what we believe. This declaration can be painful, and hard, but I also believe that those moments are some of the most transformative moments of our lives. For it is very different to say that we believe in a God that walks with us through the valley, as opposed to the mountain top. To do so is to make a radical declaration of faith that will not only shape our world view, but the faith of those around us.

I am drawn to this declaration, and as a result, decided to pen this declaration.

Even on the darkest nights, and even in seasons of death and loss, God is with us. God is with us in doctor's offices and in therapy sessions. God is with us in miscarriages and failed marriages. God is with us when the news feels too hard to hear, and in grief that feels too heavy to carry. No matter where we go, no matter what wilderness we find, God is with us. I truly believe that. However, for the days when that road gets hard, I will carry these words from Psalm 23 close.

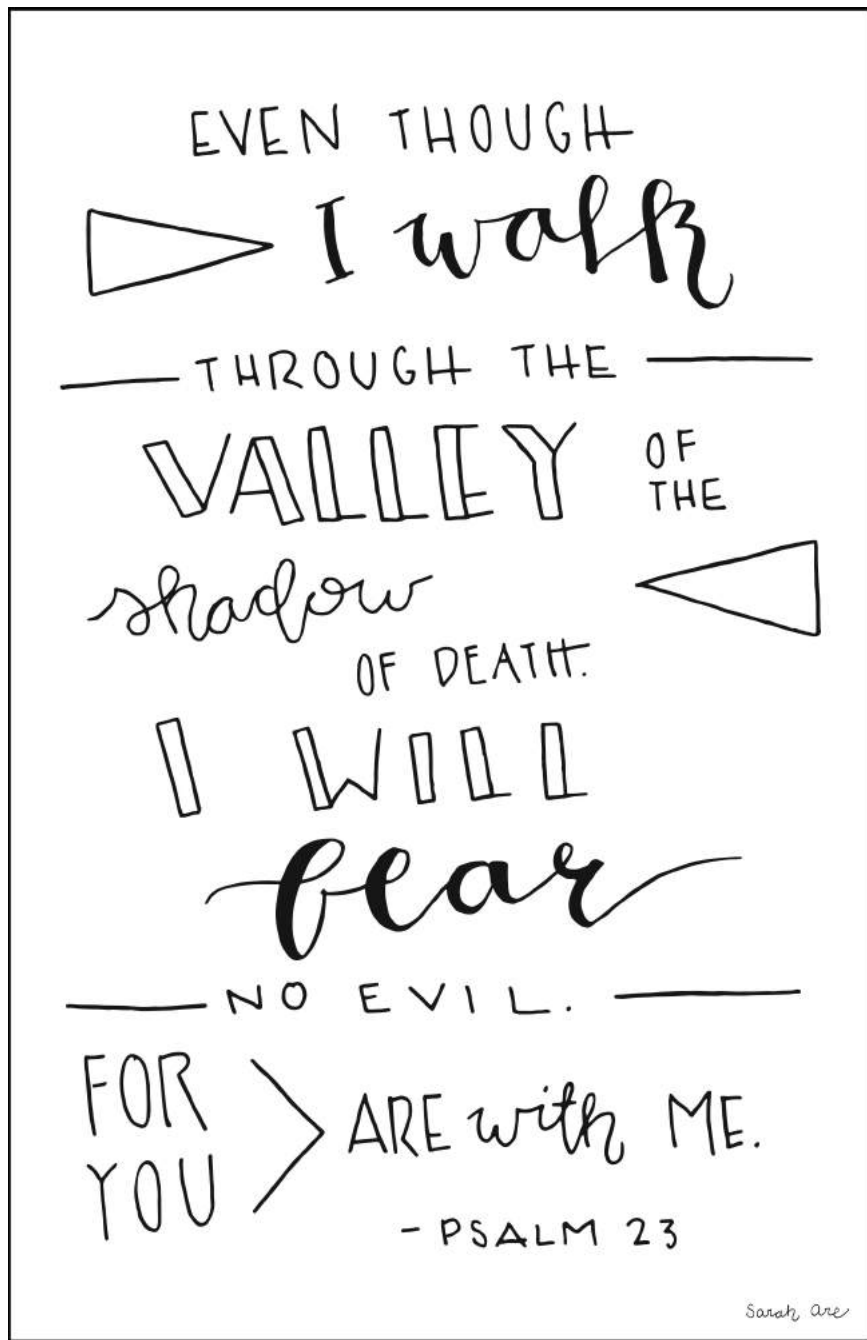
May we believe. Help our unbelief.

PRAYER

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Wilderness Song | Lauren Wright Pittman



Through the Valley | Sarah Are

Second Week of Lent | MARCH 8-14

READ PSALM 121

FROM THE ARTIST | LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

I grew up in the mountains. Narrow, ascending trails and sudden bluffs are the makings of my home. I spent my formative years getting lost in the woods, following the scent of pine, listening to bubbling brooks and tasting the breeze. This psalm of ascent reminds me of those days, and the ways in which the mountains were my sanctuary, my comfort, and the very dwelling place of God. Each leaf's unique shape taught me something new about who God is, and in turn, something about who God created me to be.

This psalm is a song for the wilderness. It begins with the assurance that the one who made heaven and earth and all in between will be your help. As you journey, your foot will not slip. Your feet will stay firm on the path, and though you will need rest, God will "neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121: 4). As you meet the blazing sun and the harsh cold of the night, God will be your shade, right by your side. The sun and moon will not strike you, but illuminate your way. The wilderness is dangerous; it wouldn't be wilderness otherwise, but God is not absent—though it may certainly feel that way. This psalm comes from that place of needing affirmation. God guides "your going out and coming in." We all enter and leave the wilderness throughout our lives, and God is with us always.

I drew this mandala focusing on the first two verses in repetition. The land formations, waterways, and vastness of the universe proclaim God's providence and love. Just as the countless planets spin on their particular angle, and the inching worm finds its nourishment, each of us is held by the Maker of heaven and earth.

PRAYER

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.

Poem on Wilderness

THE WILDERNESS IS A PLACE OF ISOLATION;
IT IS ALSO A PLACE OF CONNECTION

We sat around a six person table, For don't most holy moments happen around a table? Six women, six heartbeats, six names and identities.	She went on to speak of hurt and grief, Of a prayer to God to end suffering. She went on to tell us her most vulnerable truth, And in an instant that small leather booth Became church.
We gathered there once every twelve days, To read and pray, to learn each other's names. It was nothing more than a burger bar, And we were nothing more than the truths we shared, So sitting around a basket of fries, I assumed I knew everyone there.	For in naming the wilderness, that space became Not only the place of her greatest pain, But also the place where we became One.
But then the woman directly to my right Said quietly to the group of six that night, "I had an abortion when I was young." And my heart stopped. And my heart sunk.	In an instant, she became her own light. And in an instant, we were changed. For in that instant, we saw her wilderness walk, So in that instant, we became Six names, six united identities, one heartbeat.
For she had kept this wilderness in. She had carried this weight alone. She had grieved and prayed for peace, And I had never even known.	I think the wilderness does that. Sometimes you walk it alone. And sometimes you tell that story And a booth becomes home.

Prayer by Sarah Are

READ JOHN 9:1-41

FROM THE ARTIST | LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

The beauty and challenge of this story is that Jesus doesn't heal alone. He invites the man to co-create with him, to be an active participant in his own renewal.

There is no quick fix. Jesus doesn't grant him sight through a profession of faith or a tap on the shoulder. Instead, the man enters the messy wilderness of healing by enduring three stages of blindness—by birth, by mud, then by water—before he opens his eyes to the world of color and light.

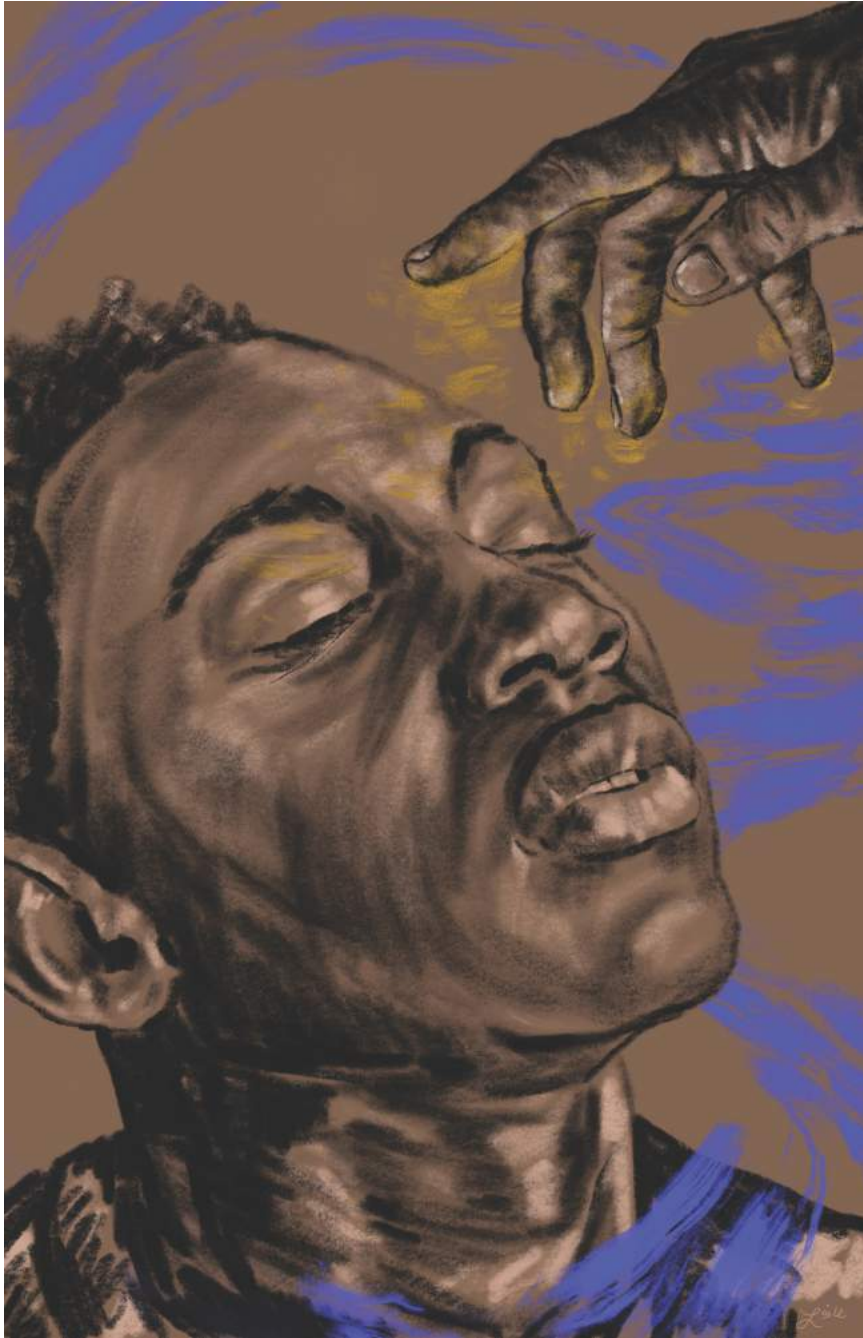
He must go deeper into his own personal wilderness—away from his healer, away from his accepted and familiar place outside the city. He must risk public shaming and social scrutiny in order to go into the city center—where he is both not allowed and yet sent—and submerge himself to a quick death of his old life, a death of his senses, a death of what was once all too familiar and all too hard.

When I place myself in the man's shoes, I imagine myself receiving Jesus' command to go—to go beyond what is familiar into territory unknown; to be an active participant in my own continual healing and transformation; to surrender myself to a death of sorts, one that forces me to submerge into God's murky and living waters so I can once again be reborn and awaken to the world with new eyes.

In this image, the pool of Siloam surrounds and lures the man, like baptismal waters claiming his place in the family of things.

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Siloam | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

3.15- 3.21

Journaling & Reflection

THE WILDERNESS IS A PLACE OF ISOLATION;
IT IS ALSO A PLACE OF CONNECTION

*Who have you met and encountered in the wilderness?
How have they shaped your journey?*



Journaling & Reflection

Reflecting on the poem, if you were to open the doors of your heart, what truth might come out? What wilderness emotions are you afraid to let loose?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Poem on Wilderness

THE WILDERNESS IS A PLACE OF DISRUPTION

My grandfather was a
good man,
But he believed
That wilderness emotions
Were not to be seen.
Cry with the door closed,
Don't dwell on the negative.
Chin up, kid,
We've been here before.

My grandfather was a
good man,
But I'd like to say—
The wilderness is here to
interrupt your previously-
scheduled programming.

Like water in the desert
And setting the slaves free,
The wilderness might be
The very thing we need,
The very thing we dream,
The very thing we plead
For.

I guess what I'm trying to
say is—
It never seems appealing to let
a bird in the house,
But if you do,
Then you might as well
Open every window and door.

And if you do,
Then you just might
find yourself
Basking in the light,
Dancing in the breeze,
Overwhelmed with the beauty
That an open door brings.

So I'm opening my door
And inviting in the wind,
To rustle up my heart
And start over again.

For sweeping the truth under
the rug
Has never gotten us far.
So may the wilderness be like a
Bird in your house.
Throw open your doors.
The truth must come out.

Prayer by Sarah Are

READ JOHN 4:5-42

FROM THE ARTIST | LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

A wilderness exists between them. Samaria (currently known as part of the West Bank) was a region between Judea and Galilee, a place most Jews journeyed around, not through. Long-standing religious animosity existed between Jews and Samaritans. By cultural standards, a woman was not to encounter a man alone, and it was considered indecent for a man to speak to a woman in public places.

A wilderness of isolation and shame exists within the woman. She has had too many husbands, but not by choice. She's been labeled infertile, and in turn, been divorced and passed around from man to man. She's been widowed, grieving men who have died from sickness and from war. She's had to sell her body to survive. She's been shunned and shamed by other women. She's been objectified and sexualized since she was a child. She's still a child, but she's lived a hundred lives. She is one woman, but she holds within herself the pain and secrets of thousands of women throughout time and space.

And in this wilderness terrain—a space where she is both vulnerable and alone, where she blends in but also longs to be seen—she is sought out, welcomed, known. That's all she needs, really—to be seen. Really seen and truly known.

A wilderness exists between them, and yet the wilderness brings them together. The wilderness becomes a place to begin again. She leaves her jar behind, filled instead with a new story to share.

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

READ EXODUS 17:1-7

FROM THE ARTIST | HANNAH GARRITY

It is in the wilderness that we question God. Is God among us? Is God here? Are you there, God? It's me, calling out to you. In this text, God proves her presence by telling Moses to strike water from a rock with the same staff he used to strike the Nile. As the leaders of Israel see the water, they see the love of a parent, of God's love for her children.

When a son questions, pushes back, and complains desperately, his mother makes sure his basic needs are met. A father can see through his daughter's struggle, deeper into her patterns, her hopes and dreams, further into her future. A daughter's father acts to sustain her, to guide her. In our wilderness moments, love is relief. It is like a flowing out of pain. Kindness, love, and care all combine to wash over us, to embrace us.

Particularly in our travels through emotional and social wilderness, we meet with God in the most unexpected and painful spaces. In this image, I envisioned the water that God sends to the Israelites. Water comes in many forms, pouring out, flowing in, washing over. The Holy Spirit flows. She is like water in many forms—pouring out, flowing in, washing over.

PRAYER

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Pouring Out | Hannah Garrity