



Smyrna, Tennessee

St. Patrick's Anglican Church

An Ancient Faith for Modern Times

Letters from the Wilderness #8

Dear Saints,

This week we have a letter from a fellow wilderness traveler, Fr. Chris Findley, who has an important reminder for us all.

Fr. Ray+

Letter to My Fellow Wilderness Travelers:

Of all the great truths of Scripture I think there is one that humanity tends to forget over and over again. We see evidence of it in the Old Testament. The first whispers of it occur when Adam and Eve are banished from their place in the Garden of Eden. Later we hear God's call to Abram when he says, "*Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.*" (Genesis 12:1) As the story of God's people unfolds we see them constantly on the move, guided by their Lord to the next phase of their life. As the nation of Israel grew in Egypt after the death of Joseph they knew Egypt was not their home. Moses was sent to call them out through the Exodus event. God promises Moses, "*I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt...to a land flowing with milk and honey.*" (Exodus 3:17) Through his servant Moses God frees his people from their slavery in Egypt and they begin their journey to their promised land. But it is

not an easy road. The people question, doubt, stray, rebel, fight, and wander before they finally settle into the promises of God. You see, throughout the Old Testament we discover that the people of God are a *wilderness* people.

But in the New Testament it really is no different. Jesus is born into a nation under Roman occupation. The people are expecting a warrior savior to save them, not a suffering servant to redeem them. Jesus' ministry begins in the wilderness with his Baptism by John and follows with his temptation in the wilderness by Satan. It is often in the barren places where Jesus teaches the people as they come out from the towns to hear him. He is crucified on the town garbage dump, literally and figuratively the furthest place from the temple and the presence of the Lord. He tells his followers to "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*" (Matthew 28:19) And the New Testament records how the Church did just that, first in Acts and later in the missionary work of St. Paul. In all of this we discover that the Church of Jesus Christ is a *wilderness church*.

I review all that for you as a way of reminding us that the wilderness is the place where God's people normally reside and normally called to travel. We are not home yet. If you look back throughout history, not just in the Scriptures, but in the grand sweep of the history of the church right up to our present day, you can see that God's people are always in a state of being called out – of recognizing that indeed we are still East of Eden. We are still called to follow night and day the Exodus from the oppression of sin to the freedom of obedience and faithfulness. We are still called to the missionary work of making disciples of all nations as our Lord commanded. We are still called to be wilderness people. In fact it is the normal way of life, for us, God's People, for us, the Church of Jesus Christ.

We cannot be discouraged by our call to the wilderness life. The first temple for our Lord was a tent! We cannot be distracted by the desire to settle if marching orders have been given. There are lessons God's people learn in the wilderness that they will learn no where

else. Chiefly, I believe when we are in the wilderness we learn to follow, trust, and obey. And in the wilderness we learn the benefits and joys of each of those.

That's why God gave his first "wilderness people", Israel, the Ten Commandments. That's why for generations they were part of the moral training for all baptismal candidates during Lent. That's why they're important for us in the 21st century to rediscover.

Because in the end, we're all wilderness people.

Hope to see you Wednesday night at 6:30.

In Christ,

Fr. Chris Findley