



Briton Riviere, *The Temptation in the Wilderness*, Oil on Canvas, 1898.  
Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London, UK.

---

Greetings!

Please read [Matthew 4: 1-11](#)

I know this story is out of order on the liturgical calendar, but Wilderness is on my mind. Wilderness is a Lenten theme.

Lord, who throughout these forty days,  
For us did fast and pray,  
Teach us with you to mourn our sins,  
And close by you to stay.

Within that theme are some important notions of the interior life to be examined. Read or sing the whole text of [Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days](#). You can find it in your United Methodist Hymnal, #269.

When I pastored in the local church I always included this hymn in Ash Wednesday and Good Friday liturgies. The bookend purpose was to give voice to our experiences individually and in community during Lent.

Likewise the visual splendor of Briton Riviere's painting of Jesus in the Judean Wilderness titled *The Temptation in the Wilderness* is also so helpful during Lent. All art welcomes you to bring your experience to the music, the canvas the poetry or prose. *The Temptation in the Wilderness* is a familiar place. Wilderness. Is it a good thing? Is wilderness a bad thing? Is wilderness somewhere in between?

When I saw the Judean wilderness with my own eyes (It cannot be described, it must be experienced) I connected the artform with the real place. Wilderness, quiet - the

noise of silence and the constant blowing of the wind - produce a sensory moment that is, well, I can't find the right words! But you know it is a place to be because you need the "sound of silence" and the wilderness. The memory of the experience of seeing with my eyes the real thing and remembering the power of the painting connects with the multiple wilderness experiences of my life. Some were good experiences. Some I would call bad. But when I turn around and look back, I see both working together to make me who I am now. This is the power of reflection, but can we really reflect without wilderness?

Jesus never seems to define wilderness in this text from Matthew. What we do see is a Jesus fully in control of his emotional self in the midst of three distinct temptations. In each experience, Jesus used sacred text from Deuteronomy as a resource to distinguish himself from the aggressor – the evil one – Satan.

Scripture, remembered like the music that floods our minds and the artforms that fill our souls, changes us forever. It fills us with that which sustains even if it's not understood in the moment. Throughout his ministry, Jesus would use the artform of scripture from the Sermon on the Mount, the Greatest Commandments and many others.

So as we continue in this Lenten Season, perhaps we might consider the art forms that invite us to an experience that transport us away from our busy lives into a moment of personal reflection.

### **Conversation**

- What colors do you see in this painting?
- Is this a sunrise or a sunset?
- Have you been to a place like this? Have you stilled yourself in extended silence?
- When you hear only the blowing of the wind, what is it saying to you?
- Who is someone you know, living or deceased, famous or not, some you may not even know – who needs this painting as a source of inspiration?

### Prayer

Lord of the Fast, I come before you as a sinner But fully aware of your divine mercy. Still, I need this fast. For only in stepping away from the things of this world Am I able to fathom the immeasurable gift That is my redemption. Turn my nose from the scents around me That I may again know the sweet fragrance of Christ. Numb my tongue from all that allures it So that I may taste anew the bread of my salvation. Dull my touch to all sensations That I feel only the pulse of my heart longing to reconcile with my brother and my sister, and you, my maker. Stop my ears from all that lure them So that I may hear your song of mercy calling me back to the embrace of my father. Blind my eyes from all that distracts them So that I may gaze fully on the light of Christ. And once we have met There in wilderness Then return me to the world. Send me back among your people. That I may fill their senses with all I have found in you: All that is good All that is loving All that is merciful. Amen.

Peace,

*Todd*

Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent  
Ohio River Valley District, United Methodist Church

---

