

# Wilderness

POETRY PRAYERS BY SARAH ARE

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*There are a number of ways to utilize poetry in your ministry. You might print and distribute these prayers to members in your community, or read them aloud to open and close study sessions. In worship, you could offer a poem as an opening reflection, a meditation during the sermon, a moment of reflection after the sermon, or as a written prayer printed in the bulletin. However you utilize these poems, please include credit as follows: Prayer by Sarah Are | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org*

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## Ash Wednesday | 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.

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## *The First Week of Lent* | 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.

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*The Second Week of Lent* | 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.

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*The Third Week of Lent* | 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

For in naming the wilderness,  
that space became  
Not only the place of her greatest pain,  
But also the place where we became  
One.

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.

I think the wilderness does that.  
Sometimes you walk it alone.  
And sometimes you tell that story  
And a booth becomes home.

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## *The Fourth Week of Lent* | 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.

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*The Fifth Week of Lent* | 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.

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## Holy Week | 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.

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## *Easter Sunday* | 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?