

Season of Creation
Wilderness/ Outback
Sunday 20th September 2026
When the Earth Groans

GATHERING

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Biddegai people of the Eora Nation, the first inhabitants of this place.

**We honour their deep care for Creation,
and pay our respects to Elders past and present—
and to all who continue to uphold culture and care for Country today.**

We light the Candle to acknowledge the presence of God.

God is here!

God is always here!

God is with us!

God is always with us!

Introduction to our theme

Today is Outback/Wilderness Sunday, a time to honour the wild places that remind us the world is more than human. Wilderness is not empty land waiting to be used; it is a living community of plants, animals, insects, rocks, rivers, and skies, each with its own place in God's creation. In Scripture, wilderness is where people encounter both hardship and holiness, where fear gives way to trust, and where God is discovered in unexpected ways.

Call to Worship

Earth cries out in drought and fire.

God hears the groaning of creation.

Rivers shrink and the creatures thirst.

God hears the groaning of creation.

We bring our grief and our fear.

God hears the groaning of creation.

Come and worship God who weeps with us

whose Spirit can reach beyond our words.

Sing:

Wake, Now My Senses (Tune: Slane, 10 10 10 10, TiS 547)

**Wake, now my senses, and hear the earth call;
feel the deep power of being in all;
keep, with the web of creation your vow,
giving, receiving as love shows us how.**

**Wake, now my reason, reach out to the new,
join with each pilgrim who quests for the true;
honour the beauty and wisdom of time;
suffer your limit, and praise the sublime.**

**Wake, now compassion, give heed to the cry;
voices of suffering fill the wide sky;
take as your neighbour both stranger and friend,
praying and striving their hardship to end.**

**Wake, now my conscience, with justice your guide;
join with all people whose rights are denied;
take not for granted a privileged place;
God's love embraces the whole human race.**

**Wake, now my vision of ministry clear;
brighten my pathway with radiance here;
mingle my calling with all who will share;
work toward a planet transformed by our care.**

(Words: Thomas J S Mikelson)

https://youtu.be/SQDka_vN2Ns?si=t0ujCHT0btABdaaH

Opening Prayer

God of wilderness and rain, when earth is dry, when hope feels distant, when
grief feels heavier than prayer,

help us to remain present.

Help us to listen to creation's cries, to resist easy answers, to trust that your
Spirit prays and moves within our silence.

Amen.

**Sing: TiS 417 *Loving Spirit, Loving Spirit* (Shirley Murray). Tune TiS
650**

https://youtu.be/EK1TnwK7_o0?si=RgX8LBGZWj1WRXoc

**Loving Spirit, loving Spirit,
you have chosen me to be —
you have drawn me to your wonder,
you have set your sign on me.**

**Like a mother you enfold me,
hold my life within your own,
feed me with your very body,
form me of your flesh and bone.**

**Like a father you protect me,
teach me the discerning eye,
hoist me up upon your shoulder,
let me see the world from high.**

**Friend and lover, in your closeness
I am known and held and blessed:
in your promise is my comfort,
in your presence I may rest.**

**Loving Spirit, loving Spirit,
you have chosen me to be —
you have drawn me to your wonder,
you have set your sign on me.**

Words: Shirley Erena Murray. © 1987 by The Hymn Society.

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Prayer of Confession

Creator God,

we confess that we often look away from suffering—
human suffering, creaturely suffering, the suffering of earth.

Remove that which keeps the harsh realities of life
at an arm's length from our hearts.

(Silence is held)

Forgive us for our belief that someone else
will solve what belongs to all of us.

Forgive us when we choose comfort over compassion
and ease over empathy.

(Silence is held)

Open our eyes and our hearts to what is real.

Amen.

Words of Grace

Hear the good news:

The Spirit groans with us.

God has not abandoned creation to suffer alone.

Christ has walked the wilderness before us, and resurrection has already begun its quiet work.

Hope remains.

Thanks be to God.

We pass the Peace of Christ

ENGAGING THE WORD

Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures

Joel 1:8–10, 17–20

⁸Lament like a virgin dressed in sackcloth for the husband of her youth. ⁹The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn, the ministers of the Lord. ¹⁰The fields are devastated, the ground mourns; for the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil fails.

¹⁷The seed shrivels under the clods, the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are ruined because the grain has failed. ¹⁸How the animals groan! The herds of cattle wander about because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep are dazed. ¹⁹To you, O Lord, I cry. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flames have burned all the trees of the field. ²⁰Even the wild animals cry to you because the watercourses are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

**Sing: AoV2-003 / ATOK 313 Longing for light we wait in darkness /
Christ, be our light (1993 Bernadette Farrell)**

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

**Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.**

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

**Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.**

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others
walls made of living stone.

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.*

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.*

https://youtu.be/qibAAo0JiEQ?si=M_NKFfNXvBOYvzLr

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Readings from the Christian Scriptures

Romans 8:15–27

¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ —if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. ¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Sing: Bless the Lord my Soul (Taizé) (TiS 706)

***Bless the Lord, my soul,
and bless God’s holy name.***

***Bless the Lord, my soul,
who leads me into life.***

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https://youtu.be/lsm919bwwag?si=H3_JkZmeMeT6l0-D

Matthew 3:13— 4:1-11

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

⁴Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” ⁷Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is

written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

An Affirmation of Faith

***We believe in God, who creates all things,
who embraces all things, who celebrates all things,
who is present in every part of the fabric of creation.***

***We believe in God as the source of all life,
who baptizes this planet with living water.***

***We believe in Jesus Christ, seen in the suffering one,
the poor one, the malnourished one,
the climate refugee - who loves and cares for this world
and suffers with it.***

***And we believe in Jesus Christ, the seed of life,
who came to reconcile and renew this world
and everything in it.***

***We believe in the Holy Spirit, the breath of God,
who moves with God
and who moves among and with us today.***

We believe in everlasting life in God.

***And we believe in the hope that one day God will put an end
to death and all destructive forces.***

(Lutheran Theological College, South India, adapted)

Offering

Offering Prayer

As we bring these gifts, we remember that all generosity begins in creation:

rain that falls on the just and unjust, soil that nourishes wheat and weeds, sunlight that feeds, and communities that sustain one another.

Receive what we offer today and use it for the flourishing of people and places, for justice and restoration, and for the healing of your world. Amen

Reflection *Into the wilderness* Rev Natasha He

<https://vimeo.com/1157083985?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Greetings and welcome to Word around the bush. My name is Reverend Natasha He..

As we move into the first week of the season of Lent, we hear in our gospel reading that Jesus is being led into the wilderness. The wilderness is never comfortable. It is a place without soft edges, A place where hunger speaks louder than reason. Where the future feels uncertain, where the voice of God can feel faint and temptation feels convincing. The wilderness is where illusions fall away about truth,

about God and about ourselves is laid bare. And it is there after his baptism

that Jesus is led, not pushed, not abandoned, but led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

This alone should make us pause.

The same spirit that descended like a dove, the same voice that declared, this is my son. the beloved now leads Jesus into a place of testing. Lent begins not with triumph, but with tension. Not with miracles, but with hunger. Not with crowds, but with solitude. This is not a detour in Jesus' story. This is preparation in the gospel of Matthew. Timing matters.

Then Jesus was led into the wilderness.

Then after the baptism, after the affirmation, after the certainty of identity. And that matters because the temptation does not come when we are weakest in faith. But often when we are clearest about who we are, the question is not whether Jesus is a son of God.

The tempter does not seriously doubt it. The question is what kind of son he will be?

Every temptation sounds the same or starts the same. If you are the son of God, not prove it, but use it. Use your power, your status, your identity for yourself.

And here is what Lent places before us. Temptation is rarely about choosing evil over good. It is about choosing the wrong good, the shortcut, the compromise, the self-serving version of God's promise. After 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus is hungry. Real hunger, bone deep hunger, the kind that distorts vision and weakens resolve.

And the first temptation almost sounds compassionate.

If you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

What's wrong with bread?

What's wrong with meeting a legitimate need?

What's wrong with feeding yourself

Nothing but how?

This is a temptation to use power to avoid dependence, to turn faith into control, to treat God not as the source of life, but as a tool for self-sufficiency.

And Jesus answers.

One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

This is not a rejection of physical need because Jesus will later feed the hungry and abundantly. This is a refusal to make the survival the ultimate value, and then confronts us with the same question.

What do we reach for first?

When we are hungry, physically, emotionally, spiritually?

Do we trust God enough to wait or do we grasp, manipulate, justify the wilderness reveals just how quickly we try to turn stones into bread, how easily we make consumption or comfort into our own saviour.

The devil takes Jesus to the holy city, the pinnacle of the temple, the religious centre, the place of God's presence.

If you are the son of God, throw yourself down.

This is not about hunger anymore. This is about visibility.

This is a temptation to confuse trust with testing, to demand proof instead of practicing faith to turn God into a safety net rather than a living relationship.

And again, Jesus responds,

do not put the Lord your God to the test.

There is a subtle danger here for religious people, especially leaders, the temptation to perform holiness, to make faith impressive, to equate success with attention.

Lent strips us of that illusion. God is not interested in being used for display. Faith is not proven by drama. Obedience is not validated by applause. Sometimes the most faithful things that we can do is not to jump, but to stay grounded, hidden, ordinary, and obedient.

The devil shows Jesus, all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and says, all these I will give to you if you fall down and worship me.

This is the most dangerous temptation of all because it looks like success.

No cross, no suffering, no rejection, just influence, authority and results.

Now, this is a temptation to achieve God's ends without God's ways to trade faithfulness with effectiveness, to bow down just a little, to power, to empire, to fear in order to get things done.

And Jesus refuses

Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.

There are some things that we cannot put a price on some paths that negate the very kingdom they claim to build.

This Lent let us ask ourselves, what are we willing to compromise to feel successful,

secure, or relevant?

Where have we been tempted to kneel before something that promises control but demands our allegiance?

After the temptations, the devil leaves and the angels come and they wait on Jesus.

The angels come not before the struggle. They come after the obedience.

God does not remove Jesus from the wilderness, but God does not abandon him there either.

This is the hope that Lent offers us.

The wilderness is not the end of the story.

Temptation does not get the final word.

Faithfulness, even when unseen is met with grace, a gospel reading is not just about

Jesus, it is about the shape of a faithful life.

We too live in a wilderness season globally, socially and spiritually, a world hungry for easy answers. A church tempted by spectacle, a society willing to trade truth for power, Lent calls us back not to comfort, but to clarity, to remember who we are,

to refuse shortcuts, to trust that God's word is enough.

The good news is not that Jesus avoided temptation, but that he faced it faithfully on our behalf and showed us another way. And because he did, we are not alone in our wilderness.

The Spirit who who led Jesus still leads us.

The God who spoke at the baptism still speaks over us,
and the angels still come often, quietly, often late, but always faithfully.

So this Lent, do not run through the wilderness,
but take the time to pause, listen fast, pray and resist
because it is here, it here that God is shaping us for resurrection
right now, right here in this world.

Amen.

Sing: TiS 419 *Like the murmur of the dove's song* (Carl Daw)

Like the murmur of the dove's song,

like the challenge of her flight,

like the vigour of the wind's rush,

like the new flame's eager might:

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

To the members of Christ's body,

to the branches of the Vine,

to the Church in faith assembled,

to her midst as gift and sign:

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

With the healing of division,

with the ceaseless voice of prayer,

with the power to love and witness,

with the peace beyond compare:

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

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<https://youtu.be/o4q-nj66X-0?si=eHYQTRHvXevnJNd8>

Announcements

Prayers of the Peoples

God of wilderness places,
we pray for wilderness scarred
by drought, fire, erosion, and flood.

Hear our prayer

and help us give birth to a renewed creation.

We pray for species disappearing quietly, for forests under pressure,
for oceans warming, and for places where the balance of life feels
increasingly fragile.

Hear our prayer

and help us give birth to a renewed creation.

We pray for farmers watching the skies, for communities displaced by changing climates, for firefighters, scientists, conservation workers, and leaders making decisions that will shape generations yet unborn.

Hear our prayer

and help us give birth to a renewed creation.

We pray for those who grieve the destruction of earth,
for feelings of stress and anxiety we bear,
for the helplessness many experience.

Hear our prayer

and help us give birth to a renewed creation.

And we pray for your Church that we might be communities of courage rather than fear, of action rather than apathy, of hope rather than denial.

Hear our prayer

and help us give birth to a renewed creation.

Spirit of God, groan within us, pray within us, and lead us toward healing.

Amen.

The 'Abba' Prayer:

You are invited to pray in the spirit of the Abba/Lord's Prayer, and in your original language, as that is appropriate

***God - heart of the world:
revealed through every aspect of creation:
understood through our awareness.***

***May we honour the holiness of creation and act accordingly
so that your love is reflected in the way we live.***

May we always be thankful for the food we eat

and the friends we have.

*May we forgive those who transgress against us
and be forgiven for our own.*

*In the freedom of love may we live as your heartbeat
and not be compromised by hesitation.*

*Through our freedom, may your justice
be seen and heard and experienced
forever and ever. Amen. (Sherri J Weinberg)*

Sing: Where the green will rise again

<https://strathdeemusic.com/WhereGreen.html>

Where the green will rise again

Bud and blossom in the breaking

Earth will smile and ease her breaking

Drought or flood through sun and rain.

So the green will rise again.

Water, river clear again,

When with skill and science blending

Health returns from our befriending,

When we watch and nurture, then

There the green will rise again.

Hands and minds with vision plain

People with a sense of wonder

Caring lives that do not squander

Plant for futures to sustain,

So we let Earth green again.

**Where the green will rise again,
When God's world knows peace and healing,
Common cause and common feeling,
Love will make us her domain,
So the green will rise again!**

Blessing/Benediction

Go now into the wilderness/outback places of the world and of your own lives.

May the God who hears creation's groaning give you compassion.

May Christ who walked the wilderness before you, give you courage.

May Spirit who intercedes with sighs too deep for words, give you hope strong enough to endure and tender enough to love this world well.

Go in peace, to listen deeply, to grieve honestly, and to join God's work of renewal.

Amen.

Sing: *For you, deep stillness* J. Perrin, R.Mann,

For you, deep stillness of the silent inland;

for you, deep blue of the desert skies;

for you, flame red of the rocks and stones;

for you, sweet water from hidden springs.

From the edges, seek the heartlands,

**and when you're burnt by the journey
may the cool winds of the hovering Spirit
soothe and replenish you.**

In the name of Christ.

In the name of Christ.

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<https://youtu.be/SpPLReD-Zuw?si=n8vGmMXCLUx3VJ8I>