

The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia

A Lenten message from Bishop Susan E. Goff: Enter the Wilderness of Your Heart

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. -Isaiah 35:1-2a

Life abundant is springing up all around us. The crocuses and daffodils are in full bloom. The Lenten rose, humble in its rank of first blossom, is far from alone this year. Winter is making way, quickly, fully and earlier than usual, for spring.

In the season of Lent, we intentionally enter the winter wilderness of our own hearts to look for the blossoms there. And they are present:

- in the gift of forgiveness that feels like quenching water on a sin-parched soul,
- in the simple yet extraordinary healing of wounds that happens little by little, day by day,
- in the bubble of laughter that escapes our lips in the most trying of times,
- in the kindness of a stranger,
- in the reconciliation that comes when we dare to listen without judgment and speak without reproach.

The wilderness of Lent overflows with life. As we give up old practices and take on new ones, we can see life as surely as we notice blossoms on the once-dormant earth. The wilderness of Lent is a training ground for life, shaping us to see it all around us, preparing us to receive the gift of abundant life from God who created us and loves us fiercely.

Don't be afraid to go to the inner wilderness you have long been trying to avoid. Don't be afraid to enter the places of fear or longing or pain that you've long been trying to ignore. Signs of life and promises of hope are already there, just waiting for you to find them. God is already there, too. And God, the author and giver of life, will never abandon you.

Faithfully yours,

The Right Rev. Susan E. Goff
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