

In our gospel this morning, John the Baptist appears in the wilderness of Judaea, preaching "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." The Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan. They were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. I began to ponder what sends people out into the wilderness to listen to this strange man who eats locusts and wild honey and dresses in camel's hair. These are people from the city and all the surrounding area. What sends people out into the wilderness?

Many years ago, I watched the movie, the Rabbit Proof fence, which is set in Australia in 1931. It is a true story of three girls - children of mixed descent – white and aboriginal, who were taken away from their families. The government saw the Aboriginal people of Australia as a danger to themselves, and the "half-castes" as they were called must be bred out of existence. The girls are placed in a camp where they, along with all half-castes of that age range, both boys and girls, will grow up. They will then presumably become laborer's and servants to white families, regarded as a "good" situation for them in life. Eventually if they marry, it will be to white people and thus the Aboriginal "blood" will diminish.

The three girls and their families lived in a camp near the local depot, but they were clearly loved. The authorities dragged them away from their mothers and took them to a camp 1500 miles away. They managed to escape and walked all the way back along the Australian [rabbit-proof fence](#), which was built across Australia to prevent rabbits from damaging the crops. The journey took them nine weeks. They left with no food or water and crossed some of the harshest territory out there. They went into the wilderness because they were desperate something that was of the utmost importance to them – their family.

John was preaching and teaching a message that the people longed for – were desperate for It was so important to them that they went out into the wilderness. The road they travelled from Jerusalem drops steeply for 3000 feet as it crosses the hot, barren wilderness and descends to the valley floor of the River Jordan. They didn't walk as far the girls, but it was not an easy trip. When we are truly longing for something, we will enter the wilderness.

And so I ask you this morning, what are you longing for and what wilderness will you have to travel through to get there. You might say I long for some quiet for an hour or even a whole morning. You may be longing for actual physical healing or release from addiction. You may be in need of restoration of relationship. Going into the wilderness may mean making some hard choices about your commitments, so that you do have time to be quiet. It could mean going through chemo treatment or surgery for healing or going to therapy or rehab for addiction. It can mean doing the hard work that it takes to restore relationship with a person you miss.

All those journeys through the wilderness are great, but I think John is offering more in our gospel. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. Repent. Turn around. Forget about all that you have been chasing to fulfill that empty space inside. When you turn to God and when you are filled up with God's love and strength, you can navigate much better all the other wildernesses you encounter. What wilderness do you need to travel to get back to God – to have Christ enter your life and know that the kingdom of heaven has come near? What wilderness will you tackle in this Advent season?

It is the second week of Advent and it is not too late. My first week didn't go as well as I would have liked. I've let myself get caught up in the preparations for the season at work and at home - worrying if it is all going to get done. I've done a few things. I've kept my radio off in the car a few times to allow for silence. I've read my Advent devotional book four days, but I have done it at haphazard times and realize I need to make it a more intentional act. That is my wilderness – taking on what gets in the way of my spending intentional daily time with my Advent book and its reflection questions.

There are so many different wildernesses that God invites us into – wildernesses that can bring us healing and wholeness. Some we choose and some we find ourselves in. No matter, John the Baptist is calling – Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near. Enter into the wilderness and see how God will fill up your hearts.