

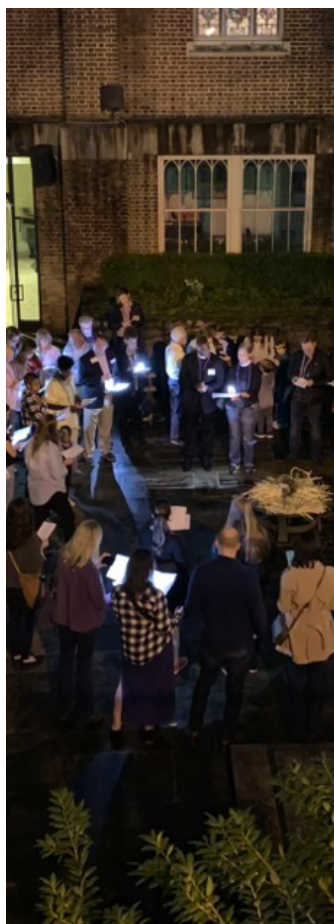


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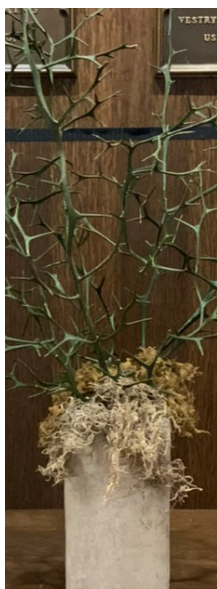
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INTRODUCTION

In the Bible, wilderness experiences take on profound significance. The Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness after Moses led them out of Egypt. Jesus spent 40 days there between his baptism and ministry. We at St. Luke's might feel like we've been sent there (again)—albeit under the leadership of our own Moses, The Rev. Michael White—as we find ourselves (again) in an interim period between rectors. This kind of experience can be a tough time of trial and tribulation, but, perhaps for that very reason, it can also be a time of renewal, refinement, growth, and transformation. People can have personal wilderness experiences, as can widespread communities. This year's Lenten devotionals center on the counter-intuitive theme of *embracing* the wilderness. We hope you'll find these wilderness reflections resonate with you and prompt thoughtful reflection as you prepare for Easter. Welcome to the wilderness!

Bill McCarty, Managing Editor
Debbie Newman, Managing Editor Emerita
Catherine McCarty, Editor
Sue Rohan, Editor
Jackie Saylor, Editor

LITURGY FOR DAILY DEVOTIONALS

Becoming Still

Breathe in slowly and exhale slowly four times, calming your mind. Be ready to listen and observe.

Invocation

God, open my heart and mind so that I may hear you.

Reflection for the Day

Read or view the reflection for today found in this booklet or email.

Contemplation

Consider this reflection. Does it relate to you?
Your response?

Closing Prayers

Petitions and prayers. What do you wish to say to God today? For what are you most thankful?

Stillness

Be still and listen for God.

Ashen Hope

From the rising dawn
to the setting sun,
as I wander this world
in mortal rags of ashes,
Lord, let me be aware of my limits,
with a heart open to embrace
that I will not live forever.

Such knowledge
I will not fear,
for you made me for paradise,
and my imperfections, cracks,
and these fragile limbs
let your limitless love
and light
shine through.

With another breath,
you have blessed me this day.
May I choose to live,
not in sameness,

nor to the tune of broken records,
but as if flowers
were growing from my belly,
and birdsong, dancing from my lips.

May I choose
to love extravagantly
right where you have me.

In this Love,
we do live forever.

Carter has been a member of the St. Luke's family for nearly 12 glorious years. She loves music, poetry, her middle school students, and her family, including her 11-year-old kitty, Edie. You can find her sitting with her beloved Mama most Sundays (on the right side, of course).

Spiritual Foundation During Transition

Prior to coming to Georgia for college, my spiritual wilderness consisted of being near the bodies of water in the Caribbean and in Miami, Florida. The sounds of the waves and the beautiful colors of the sea were so comforting and peaceful to me that they allowed me times of spiritual renewal. These were the times that drew me closer to God.

Looking back, I now understand my fascination with the bodies of water. The constant flow of water coming in and out brought to my mind how the water probably flowed over me at the time of my baptism and the water in which Jesus was immersed during his baptism prior to starting his ministry. “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water” (Matt. 3:16, KJV). These thoughts were part of my collected treasures.

In comparison to my early experiences with the beautiful waters of the sea, the North Carolina Mountains at Kanuga allowed me to absorb the fresh mountain air that rejuvenated my spirit. During my first visit for our church retreat, I felt the peace I so desperately needed as I privately grieved the transitioning from 35 years of working the Labor and Delivery Unit to the renovated outpatient clinics in Women’s Health.

The change from the familiar to the unknown was challenging, which is why I allowed myself to be persuaded to go mountain climbing for the first time in my life. At first, the hiking upward felt great. I allowed myself to breathe and to let go of all my problems. This feeling of euphoria lasted until my body refused to move as I got closer to the end of the trail. My companions tried to encourage me to no avail. It was at that time that the Holy Spirit told me “Trust God.” As I prayed, my body moved. It was God’s strength that got me to my destination, and it was God’s love that reminded me that I could do anything in accordance with his will.

Jeronia has been a member of St. Luke’s for over 30 years. She is a member of several ministries.



The Common Gray Moth
(*Anavitrinella pampinaria*)

Nearly perfect disguise,
save for the flicker
of a wing, its way to survive.

I know that ploy,
to press myself flat,
match the texture of kin,
the ombre of work,
dare not to twitch,
lest I be harmed.

But try as I might
I stay uncamouflaged,
my pattern distinct
from my habitat,
easy prey for attack
despite where I light.

Dare I unfurl my wings,
uniqueness fully displayed,
leap into flight?

Finding herself in her wildest wilderness yet, Sophia gets quiet daily, rides her bicycle, reads Ken Wilber and takes frequent naps.

Revisiting a Past Wilderness: Church and Politics

From April 1960 until March 1990, *The Episcopalian* was a “Journal of Contemporary Christianity Serving the Episcopal Church.” It constitutes an archive our church’s past struggles through wildernesses. (Note: Some terminology used is not politically correct by today’s standards.)

Outside, the crisp fall weather remained almost perfect throughout the [General Convention] sessions. ...

But, all the while, television reports flashed news of international disturbances, and black headlines screamed the latest charges as the U.S. political campaign reached its final, furious stages. The Church was reminded that it was in the world whether it liked it or not. And the unsettled times seemed to seep through the thick walls of Kiel Auditorium, sending tremors of uneasiness and dispute through the Convention.

...

The subject soon switched from theology to politics when New York layman William Stringfellow and 726 other Episcopalians issued a “statement of conscience” rebuking the Republican presidential candidate for “the transparent exploitation of racism among white citizens.” Although Mr. Stringfellow made it clear that this was a private comment, many felt that the public would think it was an official action of the Convention. A committee launched an investigation, and later a resolution was passed declaring that the General Convention was strictly neutral in matters of partisan politics.

Thomas LeBar, General Convention 1964: A Special Report, *The Episcopalian*, Dec. 1964, pp. 4, 8.

As an Episcopalian of about twenty-five years’ standing. I am profoundly ashamed of the Episcopal bishops and clergy among the 725 signers of a statement at the St. Louis Convention charging Senator Barry Goldwater with exploiting racism. ...

Further, I feel it is most unbecoming for an Episcopal cleric to indulge publicly in politics. It smacks of the corruption prominent in church history in the Middle Ages.

The Episcopalian, Jan. 1965, p. 6 (letter to editor).

Note: the referenced layman was apparently the William Stringfellow who Wikipedia describes as “an American lay theologian, lawyer and social activist who was active mostly during the 1960s and 1970s.” (See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Stringfellow.)

Reflection:

- Do you feel like Mr. Stringfellow and the other 725 were acting out of line?
- If so, does it have to do with the naming of a particular politician, or with delving into the issue of racism at all?
- Is the Church currently struggling with issues at the intersection of church and politics? If so, how well are we handling them?

Excerpts from *The Episcopalian* are courtesy of The Archives of the Episcopal Church.

We Wait in Hope for the Lord



But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,
to deliver them from death
and keep them alive in famine.

We wait in hope for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.
In him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in his holy name.
May your unfailing love be with us, Lord,
even as we put our hope in you.

– Ps 33:18-22, NIV

Photo credit, Sue Rohan.

My Own Private Wilderness

This devotional's title could be an allusion to: (1) the film, *My Own Private Idaho*, (2) the B-52's song, "Private Idaho", or (3) the well-known expression meaning mentally lost in your own world. I'm thinking of the last, but of something much worse than Idaho.

If there were a most-solitary-wilderness-experience competition, I think severe clinical depression would be a strong contender. I speak from experience ... *seriously*. My flavor of depression was usually topped with an unhealthy serving of anxiety.

I say "was" because I have been depression-free since my 2023 return to Atlanta and St. Luke's. (Coincidence?) I'm now so generally cheerful, confident, and outgoing some of you might question the veracity of my claims, thinking this is a shameless revisionist history designed to provide me a "wilderness" about which to write. Please don't think that. I have experienced years of severe clinical depression, once thought untreatable.

A mental health wilderness is a solitary place. Personal disappointment, hopelessness, and shame are your constant companions ... but provide no solace. In contrast, the communal wilderness experiences of seeking a new rector or wandering in the desert with your fellow Israelites are not inherently lonely. When experiencing a severe physical illness or the loss of a loved one, you may be solely or especially affected, but you are able (I hope) to reach out to others for comfort and support. Many of our Advent devotionals testified to our parish community's capacity to provide comfort, support, and hope in such situations.

Fyi, I have no plans to personally test St. Luke's capacity to help someone in a depression wilderness. My sense, however, is that we're up for (and already at) the task. We do our best to follow "The Way"—we love; we model vulnerability; we share our gifts; we listen; we forgive; we accept; we heal. As someone who's returned from the depression wilderness, I can't imagine asking for anything more from a community. Please don't undervalue what and who we are, and please don't stop. *Seriously!* I'd much rather have you, than my wilderness, to embrace.

Bill is a cradle Episcopalian and lifelong Southerner from Nashville. He attended St. Luke's as a young attorney in the mid-80s and returned to Atlanta in 2023 to retire. Actually, he's never been to Idaho.

***A Jeff Chu Inspired Mad Lib Psalm
(Kanuga Retreat, 2025)***

To you, O Lord, I cry out.

To you, O Lord, I have lifted up chaos.

My soul is ineffective and separated.

How long, O Lord, will you be inattentive and uncaring?

How long, O Lord? Do not refuse my cries, Holy One. Listen to me: cure and soothe.

For I know that you are mysterious and understanding.

I remember how you have healed.

I will not forget that, in your presence, my soul was relieved and understood.

But this much I know. You, O Lord, are the God of steadfast love, compassion and forgiveness.

God's love endures forever.

Although raised as a Baptist, Randy feels he has been a life-long Episcopalian and officially became one 35 years ago, when he was confirmed and joined the St. Luke's family.

The Trail Less Traveled

Part One

The theme “Embracing Wilderness” evokes a moment nearly a decade ago as a new wife, nine weeks pregnant, spending spring break at Yosemite National Park. Our trip began with a scenic drive through narrow mountain roads. Instead of marveling at the vistas before me, I spent the drive with my head in my lap staring at my shoes and trying not to retch at each turn. We arrived at an “easy hike” to see some iconic waterfalls. The hike to the footbridge to see Vernal Falls was steep but beautiful. I was tired and ready to call it a day. My husband, with the best of intentions, suggested a less strenuous but slightly longer trail for our return.

About 4 hours into what should have been a 1-hour hike, I imagined myself on a Dateline TV show special—“Enraged Pregnant Wife Pushes Imbecile Husband Off Cliff.” I was nauseous, our water supply was dwindling, and I couldn’t tell if we were climbing or descending. Why didn’t we just return on the trail we knew? Amidst the bickering, a majestic view appeared—Nevada Falls framed by Half Dome. There were no other visitors nearby, just us experiencing this unexpected gem on an arduous journey. With the beauty of Yosemite before us, our dampened spirits were restored, and we found the strength to trudge on for another two hours until we returned to the valley.

We often recall this memory with fondness and laughter, how nature saved my husband from my pregnancy-fueled homicidal rage, how his best-laid plans often go awry but sometimes lead to serendipitous rewards. Over the years, we have been on many hikes, big and small, now with children and dogs in tow, still with the occasional misadventure. Yet we are always grateful to encounter God’s bounty and appreciate the radiance of our world.

Freny has been a parishioner at St. Luke’s for the past four years. She loves exploring the forests around metro Atlanta with her family, especially Mason Mill Park.

The Trail Less Traveled

Part Two

The memory of that uncomfortable hike in Yosemite demonstrates the possibility of experiencing surprising blessings in uncomfortable moments. I have volunteered at the Crossroads mailroom for the past two years. Clients share stories and smiles as I deliver long-awaited ID cards. These interactions challenged my preconceptions. Some homeless people are friendly, some are not, but nearly everyone is innocuous and wants a better life. Despite my experience, I still hesitate to approach unhoused visitors at the back of the church during a service. I dread the possibility of that awkward moment when I can't help them tangibly or point them to a helpful resource.

Accepting this discomfort is the start to confronting my limitations. What biases are at play when I meet a homeless person in the "wilderness"? Why is a controlled space like Crossroads easier to navigate than a church or sidewalk? Why do I assume they will ask something of me? And if I don't meet their material needs, do I have nothing else of value to offer? These questions push me beyond my comfort zone. Recently, I experienced eating a meal with my son and a client, with no expectations or audience, just human connection. The unease isn't completely gone, but I pay attention and don't take it for granted.

Our church can also ask uncomfortable questions. Why doesn't St. Luke's have a designated group/person during the service to engage our unhoused visitors? If that exists, why is it not publicized? St. Luke's advocates for people at the margins, yet why are so few of them parishioners? Don't interpret these questions as accusatory or judgmental. Just as I must sit in my discomfort to create new connections, so must the community at St. Luke's. I am proud to belong to a church that "walks the walk" emulating Jesus. But let's not stick to the trails that are well-worn and known. Let's start exploring those thorny paths, and by embracing discomfort, perhaps something beautiful will grow.

Freny has been a parishioner at St. Luke's for the past four years. She loves exploring the forests around metro Atlanta with her family, especially Mason Mill Park.

Wandering in the Wilderness

I am experiencing a personal space and identity that is between times. Immediately behind me are the intense and exhausting months of treatment for a cancer diagnosis. The outlook for recovery and good health is promising. What is in between these two realities? Who am I now in this liminal space that is defined by ambiguity, disorientation and vulnerability?

These questions bring a memory of a dream that I have shared in a previous St. Luke's reflection. The dream occurred more than 30 years ago during another time of personal crisis and a long period of discernment. The experience started with a fracture in my personal life. The effects spread outward to dominate relationships with family, friends, and my career. In a similar fashion, this current health crisis has taken over both my personal and public identity. In both instances, the dream serves as a promise of hope and healing.

The Dream

The dream was so cinematic that it could easily have been a full color movie on a large theater screen at the local mall. I was in a desert that consisted of endless mountains of sand and swirling dust devils set against a bright blue sky. There were no road signs, pathways, or living beings other than myself in sight. No destination. No map. No obvious sense of time nor purpose. Walking was my identity.

Suddenly, a change appeared on the horizon. I saw a space where the sand on the ground was thinning, and new blades of green grass were pushing upward towards the sky. I knew I still had to keep walking in the desert, but now I had the assurance that all would be well.

The Lesson

The memory of the dream carries the same powerful truth today as did the original experience all those years ago. I believe the message in both instances is God's gift of time and space being held for me to heal, recover, and grow in understanding as preparation for the next part of my life.

Thanks Be to God.

Barbara is a member of the St. Luke's Archives Committee because she believes in the power of shared stories. Barbara is grateful to all those St. Luke's individuals and groups who have stepped up to be part of her current story.

Revisiting a Past Wilderness: Racial Desegregation

From April 1960 until March 1990, *The Episcopalian* was a “Journal of Contemporary Christianity Serving the Episcopal Church.” It constitutes an archive our church’s past struggles through wildernesses. (Note: Some terminology used is not politically correct by today’s standards.)

Race relations have long been a major concern of the Church. The Christian ideal in these matters has been stated clearly and unequivocally by the Anglican Congress, the Lambeth Conference, and by the General Convention and Provincial resolutions throughout the Episcopal Church: segregation is wrong. ... The difficulty, however, comes in the application of the ideal to the actual, in putting our principles to work in the concrete circumstances of the southern community.

William S. Lea, Christian Dilemma in the South, *The Episcopalian*, May 1960, p. 35.

Several southern bishops have told me that resolutions on this issue which originate in New York, or which come from agencies of the national Church, often do more harm than good. I quote one southern bishop directly: “the atmosphere has become better (in our area) but is periodically set back by some of the pronouncements of our national Church and other Churches.”

Id. at p. 35.

... What good can be done by such article as Dean Lea’s ...? ... Supposedly the author expected to change some convictions. He will not do so.

... Unfortunately, all that the Lea group will do will be to lend aid and comfort to ... the N.A.A.C.P., and drive out of the Protestant Episcopal Church the loyally white communicants in the South and maybe also a good many in such places as Chicago and New York.

The Episcopalian, July 1960, p. 42 (letter to editor).

... There are hundreds of Negro Churchmen in the South (Negroes are never included when people say “Southerners,” apparently) for whom the forthright statements of the National Church and the less slow progress of some northern parishes are a ray of hope. Such hope may keep them loyal to a Church which for so long has treated them as second-class citizens. ...

The Episcopalian, Aug. 1960, p. 34 (letter to editor).

REFLECTION:

- Do you accept the premise that patience and moderation were necessary to achieve the ideal with the least disruption?
- Compare this to the sentiment Martin Luther King, Jr., expressed in his Letter from Birmingham Jail (see digitalcollections.libraries.ua.edu/digital/collection/p17336coll22/id/2681/).
- Is the Church currently struggling with an issue like this? If so, how well are we handling it?

Excerpts from *The Episcopalian* are courtesy of The Archives of the Episcopal Church.

Psalm 63

A Psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah.

O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

But those who seek to destroy my life
shall go down into the depths of the earth;
they shall be given over to the power of the sword,
they shall be prey for jackals.
But the king shall rejoice in God;
all who swear by him shall exult,
for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

– NRSV

Finding a Way Through

Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.

– Luke: 3:5, NKJV



Former Appalachian Trail at Unicoi Gap

When Hurricane Irma forced the closure of the Georgia section of the Appalachian Trail, it seemed impossible to find a way out. Over just five miles, I counted 132 large, downed trees on the path. About half a mile from the trail exit, part of the trail had slid down the mountain, leaving nothing stable to step on and no markers to guide me. Faced with many obstacles, carrying a 28-lb. backpack, I felt stranded—frightened, isolated, exhausted, and overwhelmed in a wilderness.

I imagined my husband Mark (who was waiting at the exit) coming to rescue me, but that wasn't possible; it was too dangerous, and he had no visibility up the mountain and no idea how difficult things were. My only option was to climb over five layers of downed trees lodged on a steep, slippery slope. I prayed for steady, wise steps, strength to navigate through the branches without falling, and perseverance to keep going. I made it out, feeling a guiding hand every uncertain step of the way.

Even when the path forward is unclear, taking one step at a time can reveal new possibilities. I found my way through the wilderness.

Sue is a lifelong Episcopalian grateful for the leadership and community of St. Luke's that will guide us through our wilderness.

“Reclaiming Jesus 2026” During the Wilderness

I have had conversations with many people who are stressed while attempting to navigate the wilderness of what’s happening in this country, and they’re questioning why God is not responding. The most consistent complaint is about the federal government’s actions that are listed in a document entitled “Project 2025.”

I’ve given this subject a lot of thought, especially after learning about families, friends and church members who are divided and, in some cases, not comfortable speaking to each other because of different political parties’ views.

As Christians, we are called to follow the teachings that Jesus gave us during his time on earth. I have compiled some of Jesus’ teachings on how to treat each other for Lent and it’s called, “Reclaiming Jesus 2026.”

1. And he answering said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.” And He said unto him, “Thou hast answered right; do this, and thou shalt live.” (Luke 10:27-28, *KJ21*)
2. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matt. 5:9, *KJ21*)
3. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.” (Matt. 5:16, *KJ21*)
4. “But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.” (Matt. 5:44, *KJ21*)
5. “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” (Matt. 7:1, *KJ21*)
6. “A new commandment I give unto you: that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples: if ye have love one for another.” (John 13:34-35, *KJ21*)
7. “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33, *NIV*)

Trust God!

Jeronia has been a member of St. Luke’s for over 30 years. She is a member of several ministries.

***A Jeff Chu Inspired Mad Lib Psalm
(Kanuga Retreat, 2025)***

To you, O Lord, I cry out.

To you, O Lord, I have lifted up [the] world.

My soul is worried and mad.

How long, O Lord, will you be [a] distant God and away from us?

How long, O Lord? Do not refuse my cries, Holy One. Listen to me: fix the world and bring healing.

For I know that you are loving and caring.

I remember how you have answered prayers.

I will not forget that, in your presence, my soul was feeling joyous and believing.

But this much I know. You, O Lord, are the God of steadfast love, Father and God.

God's love endures forever.

Jennifer is a long-time member of the Church of the Common Ground where she volunteers with the Common Soles Foot Clinic and is a graduate of Project Upstream.

The Still, Small Voice

Words are very important to us English Majors. Sometimes, though, words can get in the way, especially in our relationships. Saint Francis certainly had a way with words in his prayer life: “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace....” And yet there is another quote sometimes attributed to him, “Pray without ceasing; if necessary, use words.” Could it be that Francis is guiding us toward a more contemplative approach in our prayer lives?

Before I am excommunicated for heresy, let me add that I love the words in the Book of Common Prayer, Rites 1 and 2! And yet I would like to offer a different, perhaps deeper, way of coming closer to God. If you have ever read Fr. Richard Rohr’s work, you know that his prayer life, in fact his entire faith, is grounded in his contemplative relationship with God where he experiences God in his heart rather than in his mind. I invite you to do the same; be like Fr. Richard!

Here’s the basic idea of Centering Prayer:

Find yourself a quiet room and close the door. Then be still, listen and open your heart to God. When your mind starts to wander, as it inevitably will, gently and without judgment return to your sacred word or phrase of your own choosing and return to God’s presence. We are created in God’s image. God’s presence is always with us, within us, just waiting to connect!

The payoff is transformative: a more intimate relationship with God and a better version of your true self. The benefit reminds me of my yoga practice. Near the end of our session, our instructor always says, “Make it your intention to hold onto this feeling of peace and joy for the rest of your day.” We discover God’s love for us, not on the mountaintop, but in the still, small voice in the silence.

Lent is the perfect season for trying a new spiritual discipline. There are resources at St. Luke’s, both on-line and in person, to help you get started, and I am happy to talk anytime (404-849-5087; johnstewartjr06@gmail.com).

John and his wife, Paulette, have been at St. Luke’s for a long time. They love their church family.

An Eighteen Hole Wilderness

At a lunch this fall among St. Luke's Retired Old Men Eating Out, I overheard four ROMEOs—please stop laughing now—reminiscing about their recent Scottish golfing trip. Just envision the beautifully manicured fairways surrounded by remarkable, lush green scenery. A memorable, frame-worthy photo op. present at each tee. So, where's the wilderness?

My difficult relationship with golf began in early childhood when I (a lefty) gave it a try with readily available right-handed clubs. An eventual switch to my own left-handed clubs didn't improve my severe "handicap"—a real golfing term. After my first marriage ended in divorce, but before I married Catherine, I characterized golf as the second most frustrating thing I've ever done in my life. (Technically, that's still true, but if I *now* answer the obvious follow-up question with "marriage," people would either be confused about which one, or just think I'm being unjustifiably harsh on Catherine.)

The expression "a good walk spoiled" aptly describes what golf is to me. Some of you might concur and already appreciate this devotional's *profoundly deep* spiritual message. But for those of you who actually like the sport, or who have fortuitously managed to avoid the links, I should probably elaborate. Hint: some of the ROMEOs enjoying Scotland had the sense not to keep score.

Every day, our lives present the opportunity to have experiences no less memorable than golfing in Scotland with a bunch of ROMEOs. We can have miraculous experiences with family and friends; after a worthy job well done at work or through a church ministry; or while out in nature (with your favorite ROMEO, with someone better, or alone). In my experience, though, I/we too often try to keep score.

It brings to mind Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee exalted himself while praying in the temple—noting that he was not like "other people," such as the tax collector. At the same time, the tax collector thought himself worthy only to pray for God's mercy. Jesus said the tax collector was more justified, but I think He would also agree that we'd all be more receptive to God's miraculous creation if we simply avoided the wilderness of keeping score.

Bill is a cradle Episcopalian and lifelong Southerner from Nashville. He attended St. Luke's as a young attorney in the mid-80s and returned to Atlanta in 2023 to retire. If you want to feel better about your golf game, invite him to join you for a round of 18.

Revisiting a Past Wilderness: Striving for Mutual Responsibility

From April 1960 until March 1990, *The Episcopalian* was a “Journal of Contemporary Christianity Serving the Episcopal Church.” It constitutes an archive our church’s past struggles through wildernesses. (Note: Some terminology used is not politically correct by today’s standards.)

The Episcopal Church’s dictionary describes Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ (MRI) as follows:

This manifesto was issued by the Pan Anglican Congress in Aug. 13-23, 1963, in Toronto, Canada. It pointed to three central truths: 1) the church’s mission is to respond to the living God; 2) we are united in Christ; 3) it is time to find a new level of expression and corporate obedience. The manifesto was a call to mission which sought training for lay and clergy leadership, construction of church facilities throughout the world, and improved communications among Anglicans throughout the world. The manifesto also sought the funding to realize these goals. The authors felt that their call was radical and nothing less than “asking (for) the rebirth of the Anglican Communion.”

An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church at www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/mutual-responsibility-and-interdependence-in-the-body-of-christ-mri.

MRI is dead, if the articles and editorial in the January, 1966, *Episcopalian* truly reflect present conditions. ... [T]he primary emphasis is on money: money for faraway places, money for a concept of mission that should have gone the way of the “white man’s burden,” money that we joyfully send overseas to give ourselves clear consciences while we ignore the problems and opportunities in our own backyard. ...

MRI in its initial stages struck a responsive chord at the parish level. We saw on the international scene that twenty years of effort and billions of dollars could not unilaterally save the world or buy friendship. In MRI we foresaw a better, a truly Christian approach, and looked forward to the hope of closer relationships with our Christian brothers whose riches are not measured in terms of money. Simultaneous giving and receiving, mutual help, interdependence. How did this glorious concept get lost among the money changers in the temple? How can it be recovered?

Here’s one suggestion: start now, start small, start locally. [G]o about it in the true spirit of MRI, not necessarily with money, certainly not with the “I am here to help you” attitude which so often characterizes professional helpers.

Does your center city need help? Go there! Get out of your comfortable chair (from which it is so easy to dispatch a check to Zambia) and get to know your fellow citizens—those who share your streets and your lives.

Does Latin America (or Africa, or Asia) need help? If we have grasped the true meaning of MRI by living it, the extension to places beyond travel range will not be hard

The Episcopalian, March 1966, p. 3 (letter to editor).

REFLECTION:

- How does the letter writer's take on mutual responsibility grab you?
- Do you think we are currently, if not always, dealing with some tension between helping those at home and helping those far away?

Excerpts from *The Episcopalian* are courtesy of The Archives of the Episcopal Church.

In the sight of their ancestors he worked marvels
in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.
He divided the sea and let them pass through it,
and made the waters stand like a heap.
In the daytime he led them with a cloud,
and all night long with a fiery light.
He split rocks open in the wilderness,
and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.
He made streams come out of the rock,
and caused waters to flow down like rivers.

Yet they sinned still more against him,
rebellng against the Most High in the desert.
They tested God in their heart
by demanding the food they craved.
They spoke against God, saying,
“Can God spread a table in the wilderness?
Even though he struck the rock so that water gushed out
and torrents overflowed,
can he also give bread,
or provide meat for his people?”

Therefore, when the Lord heard, he was full of rage;
a fire was kindled against Jacob,
his anger mounted against Israel,
because they had no faith in God,
and did not trust his saving power.
Yet he commanded the skies above,
and opened the doors of heaven;
he rained down on them manna to eat,
and gave them the grain of heaven.
Mortals ate of the bread of angels;
he sent them food in abundance.
He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens,
and by his power he led out the south wind;
he rained flesh upon them like dust,
winged birds like the sand of the seas;
he let them fall within their camp,
all around their dwellings.
And they ate and were well filled,
for he gave them what they craved.

– Ps 78:12-29, NRSV

Faith Develops in My Wilderness Journey

My first thoughts of the wilderness are not of a beautiful, peaceful, welcoming place, but a place fraught with trials, fears, and self-doubts. When I feel the wilderness “creeping in,” it is time for me to stop and evaluate what’s happening and what I need to focus on to work myself out of the wilderness. Sometimes that’s a job I can do on my own, and sometimes it isn’t.

I have been known to pray for God to hurry up and tell me what I need to learn or do to get out of my uncomfortable discomfort zone. (Sadly, it doesn’t work that way... for many reasons.)

I have quit asking God, “Why me?!?” and started asking, “What now?” That doesn’t make the process easier, but it does mean I spend less time in the self-pity phase. (Think about it, who asks, “Why me?” when they win the lottery or get their dream job.)

As a child, I saw the Disney movie, *The Sword and the Stone* with the song “That’s What Makes the World Go Round.” Merlin is teaching Arthur life lessons as only Merlin can. (<https://youtu.be/BPeWComOwhY?si=i3Ni4NRVOCPIuKyZ>) A few of the lines that still move me are: “For every high there is a low, ... for every up there is a down.” I find reassurance in those phrases. When I experience the lows, the doubts, and the fears of life, I also experience the highs, the joys, and the blessings that life allows.

I wish there were a one-size-fits-all solution to finding my way out of the wilderness, but there isn’t. Life is about learning and growing from each time I find myself in the wilderness. Each time I do, I have a new and more appreciative view of all the blessings life has to offer me.

I don’t love the feeling of being in the wilderness, but I know I will benefit from what I learn from the journey. In the wilderness I often listen to Spencer LaJoye’s “Plowshare Prayer” sung by Damien Riehl and Friends: <https://youtu.be/W34dpZICNFc?si=WDluuiQpLvBcM5zf>. I get weepy at different parts of the song each time I listen to it because each part speaks to me at different times in different ways along my journey.

My faith develops as I work my way through the wilderness, and, eventually, I am thankful for each step I take along the way.

Karen is a lifelong Episcopalian. She and her husband, James, chose St. Luke’s because it is a vibrant, inclusive, and diverse community of people and talents working together to help God’s people.

Sitting with the Trees

While sitting in the silent
wilderness of my own thoughts –
her underbrush of worries
and thicket of thorny fear –
the trees remind me to
be still
and know
that
the way
to stay standing
is to bend
and receive
breathe in
and release
trusting
these roots will hold

Carter has been a member of the St. Luke's family for nearly 12 glorious years. She loves music, poetry, her middle school students, and her family, including her 11-year-old kitty, Edie. You can find her sitting with her beloved Mama most Sundays (on the right side, of course).

Wilderness to “Amazing Grace”

I had been with my mother, Grace, at Emory Hospital through many of her recent health issues, especially blood insufficiency to her feet caused by her diabetes. After much deliberation, we agreed to have part of each foot amputated. She was always a trooper and moved forward.

After the surgery, Mother asked Louis, Scott, and me to come to her hospital room for the close of the Masters—long a passion of hers. We had a blast together as she screamed, “Get in the hole!” Still, her health was not improving. She decided not to suffer through further surgery with a low percentage of recovery and chose, instead, to return to our home for hospice care.

Unlike my sister Bryna, the “nurse” in our family, I did not comprehend all that this decision would entail. Even though I was certain it was time for Mother’s suffering from diabetes to stop, the process of dying was difficult and brought much guilt. The first night at home, Mother had a difficult time, and I was frantic about how to care for her. She became unresponsive, and we thought the time she had left was very short.

The next morning, our priest, Spenser, told our ten-year-old son, Scott, that his grandmother could hear him and to talk to her even if she did not answer. Scott spoke to her and then started playing “Ode to Joy” on the piano: “Joyful, Joyful, we adore thee!” Mother suddenly woke up and was conscious. Soon, Bryna and one of Mother’s favorite nieces arrived and stayed with us until the end.

Mother remained alert for a couple of days as love and support continually surrounded us. She was able to say goodbye to many friends and family. Later in the week she grew more unconscious of those around her and died the Thursday before Easter.

I am appreciative for all that I learned from her. I know her best traits live in Bryna, me, and particularly Scott. His wonderful memories of his grandmother have had a positive impact on his life. She was his “Amazing Grace!”

Linda treasures the relationships she had developed and the gifts she had received during her 40 years at St. Luke’s.

One of my favorite wilderness experiences was a drive from San Francisco to Orange County about twenty years ago. I had a client in California who needed three large industrial buildings appraised. One was in San Francisco, and two were down in Newport Beach. Having appraised in probably twenty states by then, I was up for the trip and eager to drive on the Pacific Coast Highway (California Hwy 1). From San Jose, I made my way over to Santa Cruz and picked up “the 1.” A drive through Pajaro Dunes, Watsonville, Castroville and Seaside had me soon in Monterrey and Pebble Beach. I spent an afternoon there, did the famous 17-mile drive, and soon after Notley’s Landing found myself in Big Sur. I’ll never forget checking into a small hotel nestled on the cliffs, falling asleep and waking up to the sounds of the ocean below me. It was stunning and beautiful.

The next day, I drove down through Slates Hot Springs, Lucia, Ragged Point, Saint Simeon, and had lunch in Cambria. Then I picked up the route down through San Luis Obispo, Lompoc, and into Santa Barbara for more sightseeing. Next, Ventura, Oxnard, Malibu, Santa Monica, Long Beach and into Newport Beach to inspect two other buildings.

That wilderness experience allowed me to see and experience God’s creation in a way I never imagined. “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars ... what is mankind that you are mindful of them?” (Ps 8:3-4, *NIV*). And then man’s amazing talent and creations such as the Bixby Creek Bridge and Pebble Beach Golf Course. I did some serious thinking and reflecting about my life and came back with clarity, focus, and sharpness I had not experienced before. And trust.

What do I mean by trust? Well, one afternoon I got a flat tire on the 1. I had to pull over on a small patch of gravel, a few feet from a thousand-foot drop to the Pacific Ocean. And there I was with my hand out to hitchhike in the middle of a beautiful but very unfamiliar place. After an hour, a kind gentleman in an old van picked me up. In that moment, I chose trust over fear, although at first, there was a lot of fear. I had never hitch hiked before! I coached myself to relax and trust the Lord. That stranger took me to find a tire, brought me back to my car on the cliff, and helped install it. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8:28, *KJV*.)

A wilderness experience can be exhilarating and downright terrifying, but it has always led me to new wisdom, new perspectives, and renewed trust.

Phil is a Commercial Appraisal Review Officer in Banking and Finance. To get back in shape, he is picking up tennis again and spending more time in the gym. He looks forward to his next travel adventure in Albuquerque.

***A Jeff Chu Inspired Mad Lib Psalm
(Kanuga Retreat, 2025)***

To you, O Lord, I cry out.

To you, O Lord, I have lifted up *gratuitous cruelty*.

My soul is *angry* and *judgmental*.

How long, O Lord, will you be *absent* and *quiet*?

How long, O Lord? Do not refuse my cries, Holy One. Listen to me: *love [me]* and *smite [them]*.

For I know that you are *loving* and *forgiving*.

I remember how you have *soothed*.

I will not forget that, in your presence, my soul was *relieved* and *absolved*.

But this much I know. You, O Lord, are the God of steadfast love, *[a] source [of support]* and *always present*.

God's love endures forever.

Revisiting a Past Wilderness: What to Teach Your Children

From April 1960 until March 1990, *The Episcopalian* was a “Journal of Contemporary Christianity Serving the Episcopal Church.” It constitutes an archive our church’s past struggles through wildernesses. (Note: Some terminology used is not politically correct by today’s standards.)

Per imdb.com, in the 1964 film *Nobody Waived Goodbye*, “[a] teenage boy rebels against parental authority and must face a harsh reality when he tries to live on his own.” The below article, “No Bridges for the Funny Time,” was a review of that film.

Peter is eighteen, going to school, dating a girl he likes, and living pretty well with his affluent, suburban parents—and then he smashes the pattern of his life.

...

... He is on the verge of flunking out of school. He plays his banjo and sings with friends late into the nights, seems entirely too serious about his girl, and cuts his classes. Then ... Peter (who doesn’t have a driver’s license) playfully swipes the car and is arrested for speeding.

Peter’s dad is very, very busy [and] makes important money. He doesn’t understand what he considers his son’s foolishness and responds to his son in an authoritarian way, rather than humanly. ...

Malcolm Boyd, No Bridges for the Funny Time, *The Episcopalian*, July 1965, p. 42.

One day Peter meets his mother for lunch downtown. She asks him to come home and recommence his studies. He seems on the verge of accepting when she promptly forgets again and insists that Peter not see his girl for a period of several weeks. ...

...

... The film offers no bridges across the chasms between either persons or generations, but it honestly depicts the size of such chasms.

Id. at p. 43.

Malcolm Boyd’s review of the film ... added to my growing conviction that our Church is in serious trouble with people like Mr. Boyd functioning with our youth.

As this is an important film, it seems a double disaster that it is reviewed irresponsibly.

Why are parents always to blame when anyone under twenty-one makes a wrong choice? This priest of our Church fails to recognize what should be the most obvious point of the movie: that we all sin through “our own fault, our own most grievous fault.”

Peter has had every opportunity. His father is not ... selling cars because he likes selling cars.

Perhaps Mr. Boyd thinks that Dad should be on welfare so he can be home during the week with his son.

...

Let us please cut out the jargon and teach our kids that “I am a louse because I choose to be a louse.”

The Episcopalian, Sept. 1965, pp. 6-7 (letter to editor).

REFLECTION:

- Do you think Peter is fully responsible for the chasms Mr. Boyd describes?
- If not, do you feel the parents nevertheless must balance acceptance against what we now call “tough love”—a concept the letter writer apparently embraces without hesitation?

Excerpts from *The Episcopalian* are courtesy of The Archives of the Episcopal Church.

You Have Made Known to Me the Path of Life



I have set the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
because you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay.
You have made known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

– Ps 16: 8-11, NIV

Photo credit, Sue Rohan.

St. Luke's Wilderness of Transition

Google AI gave more than one spiritual definition of wilderness including, “a place separating people from comfort but preparing them for a new life or calling.”

Jesus understood the task that was ahead after his crucifixion on the cross, and what his leaving would do for his disciples. In Luke 21.36 (*KJ21*), he instructed his disciples to, “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

As members of St. Luke's, we are preparing for a new leader, a new rector to guide our church. I believe the words that Jesus gave to his disciples are much needed at this time. It is important for us to pray daily prayers for God's wisdom and guidance as the search team continues its work.

I am mindful that some members are still grieving the loss of staff we experienced, and I pray for God's peace and comfort for them.

Reverend Joe's farewell instruction to us as a congregation was to remind us that we are the church. I am extremely proud of the fact that as the church, we have so many talented members who serve in ministries as lay leaders and as volunteers. I am proud of the fact that we are still creating new ministries that support our vision. I am proud of the lay staff who contribute regularly to make sure our space is a prepared space of welcome and worship whenever the need arises.

I am proud of the fact that our vestry has created a newsletter that outlines their actions as we search for a rector, and I am hopeful that they will continue to share updates periodically using that format in the future.

Lastly, I am grateful to our talented clergy for the support and services they provide as we continue our regularly scheduled programs. Special thanks to our interim rector, Michael, and his wife Helen, who accepted the challenge to come and be with us during our transition.

Jeronia has been a member of St. Luke's for over 30 years. She is a member of several ministries.

Interconnectedness in the Wilderness

I don't think I am ever too far from a wilderness. The Sufi mystic poet Rumi likens the human experience to being a guest house: receiving our emotions as unexpected visitors. Some are disguised as shame, sorrow, or fear, but all are guides from beyond. These unpredictable "guests" can be seen as annoying intrusions or gifts. I would *like* to think I met all that were lying on my path or knocking on my door with gratitude, but that's just not the case.

And so, when writing my vows for my animal chaplaincy ordination, I committed to offer gratitude each morning for all that will be laid on my day, particularly when it's looming with confusion, or deceit, or mean-spiritedness. And I say:

I will strive to honor the Divine, by respecting all Creation and the interconnectedness of all Beings, leaning into the silence, holding space with the faith-filled and the faith-less, by pursuing possibilities, championing compassion and forging paths for forgiveness. May it be so.

Yes, it is taking me longer than the estimated 111 days of the 21/90 rule to turn these words into habit. Still, I pray for clarity as I wait and stumble, accepting my life is not on my timeline. And as insignificant as I may sometimes feel in "the bigger picture," I have accepted that I am a necessary piece of this whole interconnected Creation. My wilderness is now *less* scary. I am gentler with myself.

So, let us be reminded by an African proverb, "if you want to go fast, go alone, and if you want to go far, go together."

Wilderness no longer feels like singular isolation of my global ineffectiveness, but rather an interconnectedness to all Beings, pursuing possibilities to fix *just* their piece of the world. Good efforts are good. And that can be enough.

May it be so.

Michele has been a member of St. Luke's since 1984. She is an Animal Chaplain, sharing her home with Figaro, the American Short-hair who rescued her from the predictable, quiet life as an empty-nester to a world with a cat for a roommate. Figaro, who is sight impaired, constantly reminds Michele how to walk, leap, and play by faith.



When the poor and needy seek water,
and there is none,
and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the Lord will answer them,
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.
I will open rivers on the bare heights,
and fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
and the dry land springs of water.
I will put in the wilderness the cedar,
the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive;
I will set in the desert the cypress,
the plane and the pine together,
so that all may see and know,
all may consider and understand,
that the hand of the Lord has done this,
the Holy One of Israel has created it.

– Isaiah 41:17-20, NRSV

Photo credit, Ilouise Bradford.

What Now *A Diary*

I.

The not-so-great-but-known is gone.
I feel without seeing
the ground beneath my feet.

Fabric rips, no longer hindering my
reach,
buttons burst, no longer holding me
in,
I can breathe.

Shattered, the shards suspended,
light barely gets through,
nothing is possible, everything is
possible.

What if the house I envision
cannot be built
on the old foundation?

The End. Closed. Stopped.
Finished. No more. Final.
Begin.

The alarm chimes.
What?
Morning again?

Possibilities abound
like acorns at my feet.
I pick one up. Will it nourish or harm?

Aching, itching.
This is healing,
the broken made strong again.

Time stretches before me,
no destination in sight,
not even a highlighted road on a map.

The waiting and waiting,
waiting, waiting, waiting,
waiting, still waiting

for the fog of change to clear.

*Finding herself in her wildest wilderness yet, Sophia gets quiet daily, rides her
bicycle, reads Ken Wilber and takes frequent naps.*

What Now *A Diary*

II.

I fend them off,
the you-should-do-it-this-ways and
that's-the-wrong-thing-to-dos.

Is this how a seed feels
pushing up from the earth?

Each step forward a test of will,
my foot mired in inertia
to overcome the sucking pull of doubt.

Patience builds endurance builds
character.

But really,
how much character does one need?

The seed is a future
seen only in imagination and hope.

No plans,
not even after oatmeal.
But I got energy.

Light finds a way
through windows steamed
by last night's storm.

Space between the bare branches
where once green leaves grew.
You can see farther in winter.

A one-degree turn each day
can change the course
without capsizing your boat.

The facts sing a sad tale,
but my heart is light
as I traverse this uncharted path.

I have found great calm within.
Let me reach down,
help you find yours.

Finding herself in her wildest wilderness yet, Sophia gets quiet daily, rides her bicycle, reads Ken Wilber and takes frequent naps.

Revisiting a Past Wilderness: March on Washington

From April 1960 until March 1990, *The Episcopalian* was a “Journal of Contemporary Christianity Serving the Episcopal Church.” It constitutes an archive our church’s past struggles through wildernesses. (Note: Some terminology used is not politically correct by today’s standards.)

Resolved: That the House of Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church, mindful of the church assembly to be held in Washington, D.C., on August 28th, 1963, in co-operation with the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, (a) recognizes not only the right of free citizens to peaceful assemblage for the redress of grievances, but also that participation in such an assemblage is a proper expression of Christian witness and obedience, (b) welcomes the responsible discipleship which impels many of our bishops, clergy, and laity, to take part in such an assemblage, and supports them fully, (c) prays that through such peaceful assemblage citizens of all races may bring before the government for appropriate and competent action the critical and agonizing problems posed to our nation by racial discrimination in employment, in access to places of public accommodation, in political rights, in education and housing.

Bishops Act on Race Situation, *The Episcopalian*, Sept. 1963, p. 21.

... I was shocked beyond measure to read the resolution of the House of Bishops urging one and all to support the “March on Washington.”

The very concept of such a march is to pressure our law makers into passing legislation that is inimical to the best interest of the majority of our citizens. Since when indeed is our country turned over to the “minority[“?”]

The Episcopalian, Nov. 1963, p. 8 (letter to editor).

Never, during my almost seventy-seven years as a member of the Episcopal Church, do I recall any noteworthy militancy on the part of the national body of the Episcopal Church, concerning major moral questions, until now. There has been very noteworthy and courageous action on the part of individual priests of the church but not the national body until now. And now it has succumbed to become involved in the August 28 “March on Washington” a feature which will go down in history as marking a day of public disgrace.

Granting that the Episcopal representatives who participated did so

with the aim of influencing a spiritual uplift of hope in the breasts of downtrodden people, it has been apparent from the time the move was first conceived that the intent of the Negro leaders was, primarily, an act of intimidation.

The Episcopalian, Nov. 1963, p. 9 (letter to editor).

REFLECTION:

- Are you surprised that our bishops took the action they did, or surprised that some Episcopalians held the sentiments these letter writers did, or both, or neither?
- Do you feel our country is currently facing similar issues (whether relating to race or not) as those the bishops mentioned in their resolution?
- If so, what do you believe is an appropriate role for the Episcopal Church to play?

Excerpts from *The Episcopalian* are courtesy of The Archives of the Episcopal Church.

Psalm 42

As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.

When shall I come and behold
the face of God?

My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me continually,
“Where is your God?”

These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,
and led them in procession to the
house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of
thanksgiving,

a multitude keeping festival.

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within
me?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise
him,

my help and my God.

My soul is cast down within me;

therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of
Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.

Deep calls to deep

at the thunder of your cataracts;
all your waves and your billows
have gone over me.

By day the Lord commands his
steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

I say to God, my rock,

“Why have you forgotten me?

Why must I walk about mournfully
because the enemy oppresses me?”

As with a deadly wound in my body,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually,
“Where is your God?”

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within
me?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise
him,
my help and my God.

– NRSV

A “Shameful” Wilderness

Many of you know I have a two-year-old granddaughter and Michagander, Emma, whom I adore. This past summer, my wife and I regularly picked Emma up from daycare, took her to the Michigan condo we purchased on “Emma Circle”—I kid you not—and watched her for a couple of hours.

When I say we “watched her,” that pretty much sums it up. We didn’t dwell on teaching her how to conform to expectations, whether ours, her parents’, or society’s. She set the tone and agenda, subject only to basic safety considerations. We interacted without redirecting her away from her impulses, which we always found to be precious and worthy of our validation.

Our condo was a sanctuary devoid of shame. Unfortunately, our society regards such sanctuaries as transitory or artificial, and anyone who believes in them as naïve. We think it would be great to live in a world that never said “no,” but we also think, if you believe that’s possible, then “bless your heart.”

Adam and Eve’s shenanigans saddled us with the knowledge of good and evil, and we seem destined to use every opportunity to teach our children “well,” and make sure everyone stays in line ... or else. We also teach them what’s socially acceptable so they will become productive members of our society. We often end up expanding the shoulds and should-nots beyond morality, thereby planting a seed of shame in most every non-conformance or less-than-perfect performance.

St. Luke’s is already a sanctuary devoid of shame, but I sense God also wants us to clear-cut the vast, worldly “shameful” wilderness that surrounds us and reclaim it as His. Jesus did not shame the woman at the well despite knowing everything about her (John 4:4-42). When He hinted that the “exclusive” class of stone throwers should be limited to those without sin (John 7:53-8:11), I don’t think he was trying to shame everyone. Rather, I think He was encouraging us to use our God given talents for something other than throwing stones. We have our marching orders. Let’s proceed with the project of reclaiming the world as a wilderness without shame.

Bill is a cradle Episcopalian and lifelong Southerner from Nashville. He attended St. Luke’s as a young attorney in the mid-80s, returned to Atlanta in 2023 to retire, and rediscovered St. Luke’s sanctuary devoid of shame.

Finding Our Way Through the Wilderness



Hiawassee, Georgia

Truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.

– Matt. 17:20, NIV

Sometimes the obstacles in front of me—whether they’re about my country, my community, or my own life—can feel too big to overcome. I sometimes feel discouraged and wonder if things can get better. But Matthew 17:20 gives us a gentle reminder: even if we have only a tiny bit of faith, like a mustard seed, we can move mountains. While I have no desire to move these beautiful mountains, it’s about trusting that nothing is too much for me to get past.

There’s real comfort in believing this. Even if my faith feels small or shaky, it can still give me quiet strength inside. It reminds me that things can change, it’s okay to hope and trust.

The problems in front of us may not disappear overnight. But if we keep taking steps forward, letting faith guide us, the vistas before us open wide and we can overcome.

Sue is a lifelong Episcopalian grateful for the leadership and community of St. Luke’s that will guide us through our wilderness.

One of the unexpected blessings of getting older is recognizing and living through paradoxes that impart truth and valuable lessons. In my case, a later-in-life wilderness journey triggered by infirmity led me to acknowledge past mistakes, failures, and pains that opened my eyes to a quiet acceptance of “what is.” That experience also led me to the first few verses of James to discover the precious reward for such a journey: wisdom.

Another paradox is that of the word “wilderness” itself. My first reaction to the word is one of joy, in that I love wandering outdoors—the wilder the better. But wandering in the Sinai desert for forty years is no picnic, and our modern equivalent of our current political and social wilderness upheavals gives us no joy either. As I have worked mostly in affordable housing for the past four decades, perpetually struggling in that field’s wilderness also resonates. But “embracing” it? Hardly.

Yet we can find a balm if we do embrace it, as James chapter one, verses 2-4, promises (that trials produce endurance leading to maturity). I have come to believe that our society’s deep fissures—between rich and poor, urban and rural, blue and red—are rooted more in culture, psychology, and faith than in economics and politics. The sooner we embrace these damaging dichotomies face-to-face and recognize our common humanity and profound unity, the sooner we begin to heal. More money or power are not the answers.

These wilderness experiences, both personal ones and in community, have served to bind me tighter to those I love and to institutions to which I have been long devoted, such as Habitat for Humanity, the Carter Center, and other nonprofits and people in the helping fields, and most especially to the people of St. Luke’s, from whom I continually feel uplift and support. Again and again, the constant message we hear from the pulpit shows the way: to take seriously the often countercultural, even radical words of the Christ, where together we embrace the wilderness with clear eyes and pure heart, repairing the breach as we go. In fact, that is the only way out.

Bruce is a longtime member of St. Luke’s who is now pivoting toward spending more time with family while still working part-time in affordable housing development and policy.

A Jeff Chu Inspired Mad Lib Psalm (Kanuga Retreat, 2025)

To you, O Lord, I cry out.

To you, O Lord, I have lifted up *selfishness*.

My soul is *hopeless* and *angry*.

How long, O Lord, will you be *limited* and *challenged*?

How long, O Lord? Do not refuse my cries, Holy One. Listen to me: *enlighten* and *empower*.

For I know that you are *loving* and *tireless*.

I remember how you have *healed*.

I will not forget that, in your presence, my soul was *loved* and *hopeful*.

But this much I know. You, O Lord, are the God of steadfast love, *provider* and *ground of our being*.

God's love endures forever.

Bill is a cradle Episcopalian and lifelong Southerner from Nashville. He attended St. Luke's as a young attorney in the mid-80s and returned to Atlanta in 2023 to retire.

The Wilderness of Nursing in the Early 70s

Google AI describes a Spiritual Wilderness as an “in between” place separating people from comfort but preparing them for a new life or calling by stripping away worldly attachments; a place where God reveals Himself and tests faith, and where profound spiritual growth and purification occur, ultimately leading to new beginnings and a deeper relationship with God.

My decision to become a nurse was after numerous discussions with my parents (who wanted me to become a teacher) and my high school advisor, and most importantly after I prayed for God’s will to be done. I understood that nursing was not going to be easy. I learned in training that my actions and decisions were important and could determine life or death for those who put their lives in my hands.

I began my career as a Registered Nurse on the labor and delivery unit at Grady Memorial Hospital in September 1970. In the early 70s, fetal monitors, ultrasounds, and a lot of the high-risk antenatal testing we are accustomed to now were not available. Our reliance was on the assessment with fetoscopes, fetal dopplers, manual palpations (using the palms of our hands to assess contractions and fetal positioning), lab testing, and our trained instincts as medical professionals.

It was not uncommon to deliver conjoined twins and babies with extreme fetal anomalies such as missing essential organs, severe fetal growth restrictions, and extreme prematurity, and for mothers to die from high-risk diagnoses, some before delivery and some afterwards. These were the times that I felt like I was in the wilderness; these were also the times when I most felt God’s presence. In that wilderness, I felt profound spiritual growth, and that I understood God’s choice for my career.

I retired from nursing on September 1, 2023, and when I look back, I can honestly state that becoming a nurse was the best decision I have ever made. Nursing centered me and taught me the importance of seeing others as children of God regardless of their life circumstances or choices. It taught me how to love.

Jeronia has been a member of St. Luke’s for over 30 years. She is a member of several ministries.

Revisiting a Past Wilderness: Christian Unity

From April 1960 until March 1990, *The Episcopalian* was a “Journal of Contemporary Christianity Serving the Episcopal Church.” It constitutes an archive our church’s past struggles through wildernesses. (Note: Some terminology used is not politically correct by today’s standards.)

The ecumenical movement is, of course, one of the most significant religious phenomena of our times.

....

“There can be,” as I said in my address at Cleveland, “no artificial division between the sacred and the secular. The churches, if they are the expressions of the purpose and the will of God, cannot be limited, as some would declare, to special fields of worship. ... Once we have the conviction that there is a saving gospel, then that gospel must be extended and applied to every aspect of life. The gospel has to do with international relations, with peace or war, with the atom bomb, with economic conditions, with family life, for nothing human can be alien to the love of God in Christ. The church cannot be simply a reflection of the prejudices, opinions, and standards of contemporary society. For the church has the task of being the light of the world. ...”

Henry Knox Sherrill, *Nothing Less Than Unity*, *The Episcopalian*, Nov. 1962, pp. 64, 66.

Phooey on Christian unity! Why should we Anglicans be so concerned with visible unity with the Romans, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants, when we can’t even agree among ourselves as to what we ought to believe and practice? For every prayer for Christian unity, I am saying a thousand prayers against it. I love the Episcopal Church and my prayers are for Anglican unity only. I am not willing to compromise one iota. Christ’s body has many branches, as does yours and mine, and so does His Church.

The Episcopalian, Feb. 1963, p. 7 (letter to editor).

REFLECTION:

- How important is Christian unity to your faith journey?
- Regardless of your answer to the above question, do you believe the Christian message would be better served if the world observed more unity among those professing to follow Christ?
- Do you feel like greater unity among followers of Christ is feasible, particularly in the current environment?

Excerpts from *The Episcopalian* are courtesy of The Archives of the Episcopal Church.

Enter the Gate of the Lord

Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter.

I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

Lord, save us! Lord, grant us success!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you.

The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine on us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will praise you; You are my God and I will exalt you.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; His love endures forever.

– Ps 118:19-29, NIV

Photo credit, Sue Rohan.



The Lenten Rose



Defying the harsh winter freeze,
she blooms—
resilient yet humble,
head bowed in quiet humility.
Not about to shout or show off
as pansies are wont to do,
this Lenten coach
whispers from the sideline.

Brenda, a retired children's librarian and professional freelance harpist, has been a member of St. Luke's since 2004.

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

– Deut. 8:7-9, NIV



Aqaba, Jordan

God led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land with its venomous snakes and scorpions.

– Deut. 8:15, NIV

Photo credit, Sue Rohan.

Revisiting a Past Wilderness: “Skid Row”

From April 1960 until March 1990, *The Episcopalian* was a “Journal of Contemporary Christianity Serving the Episcopal Church.” It constitutes an archive our church’s past struggles through wildernesses. (Note: Some terminology used is not politically correct by today’s standards.)

Editor’s note: “Taking the plunge” into rock-bottom poverty is ... part of a month-long study program conducted by the Urban Training Center. The students are clergymen and laymen who wish to equip themselves for inner-city work; ... [T]o give them a direct experience of what life on skid row is like, the Center sends these men and women out to live as derelicts. In the following report, associate editor Thomas LaBar describes what happened to one young priest during his twenty-six-hour “plunge” into skid row.

Thomas LaBar, *The Episcopalian*, April 1965, p. 13.

At this point, Barry started around asking for help from the churches in the area. He went from Presbyterian to Roman Catholic to Greek Orthodox to storefront Pentecostal, asking for food, a bed, or a job. Time after time, he found that either the doors were locked, or the people who answered were hostile, or full of useless advice.

After hours of this weary search for help among the churchmen, Barry came to the little, bedraggled storefront Community Baptist Church. ...

Inside, he found the Rev. E. P. French, a hunched, old Negro clergyman who was feeding scrap lumber into a potbellied stove ...

...

He showed Barry to a bed which, although lumpy and frayed, was clean and warm. ...

As we had agreed the preceding night, I met Barry that morning ... where he told me the story of his night’s stay. “I don’t know what Jesus Christ looks like,” Barry said, “but I’ll be willing to bet that he looks something like Pastor French.”

Id. at p. 16.

The article “A Priest Takes the Plunge” ... is very liable to give people a wrong idea of what our religion requires of them and of the Church. The implication is that every Christian and every parish should be ready to help every derelict on demand. And since few of us do act this way, we must feel guilty.

... a Christian must be concerned with and involved in ... issues of our society ... but this does not mean that one man or parish must deal with every issue. ...

The real purpose of the priest's "plunge" [is] for him to get some appreciation of the feelings of the derelicts. ... But I do not think that an account of such an experience should be used to give erroneous ideas of Christian mission.

The Episcopalian, June 1965, p. 59 (letter to editor from two members of the clergy).

REFLECTION:

- Before reading the letter to the editor, did you feel the plunge article was giving an erroneous idea of the Christian mission?
- What do you think motivated these two members of the clergy to write their letter?

Excerpts from *The Episcopalian* are courtesy of The Archives of the Episcopal Church.

The Pharmaceutical Wilderness

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?

– Ps 22:1, NLT

For most of my life, I have struggled with a psychiatric illness which has required a lot of therapy and medication with sometimes severe side effects. I defer to specify my diagnosis and its painful symptoms, but since turning 60, my journey for better health has become more complex because of several physical health diagnoses from aging.

The medications for physical health conditions have worked satisfactorily, but because I've had to change psychiatric medication many times, this long journey has been especially challenging. Psychiatric patients may sometimes need multiple psychiatric medications to maintain stability, and if they have other diagnoses, medications for treating their other conditions might be incompatible with their psychiatric drugs.

The most unforgettable period while navigating the psychiatric medications was during my late thirties. An older medication that helped for over two decades stopped working. I stumbled for over five years trying one medication after another before finding one that worked adequately for over twenty years. When my doctor retired abruptly, my new psychiatrist wouldn't continue prescribing the medication because of its contraindication with an aging condition.

I barely functioned for two years on the new medication, but prayers led me to a consulting psychiatrist who carefully listened to my dilemma and suggested a medication that the new psychiatrist agreed to prescribe. While less effective than the medication I was on for so long, I am settled on the new medication and am functioning okay. I am grateful to God, my family, and ongoing prayers from friends and others to be out of this pharmaceutical wilderness.

In my desperation I prayed, and the Lord listened;
he saved me from my troubles.

– Ps 34:6, NLT

Thom has belonged to St Luke's for more than fifty years. He loves serving on the Lector team and greatly values all connections and friends he continues to make in the parish.

A Litany for the Wilderness

by Bryan Sells, with the editorial assistance of Gemini AI

When silence is all we hear,
Lord, meet us in the wilderness.

When we cannot see the path,
Lord, meet us in the wilderness.

When we hunger for your word,
Lord, meet us in the wilderness.

When we feel lost and alone,
Lord, meet us in the wilderness.

Let us be honest, O God, about our emptiness.
Give us courage just to be.

Let us acknowledge our ugliness.
Give us courage just to be.

Let us admit our desolation.
Give us courage just to be.

Let us confess that we have forsaken you, our God.
Give us courage just to be.

Help us, O Lord, to feel your presence
that we may face the bare-boned truth.

Guide us through the thicket
that we may see with clearer eyes.

Teach us to number our days
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Steady us with your abiding hand
that, together, we may write the story of here.
Amen.

A Collect for the Wilderness

God of the desert places, whose only Son Jesus was tested in the wilderness:
give us courage to face the bare-boned truth of our lives; that, being stripped of
all pretense, we may find our story in You; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*Bryan is the husband of Deneta and the father of Sarah Elizabeth. He has been
attending St. Luke's since 2019 and remains a work in progress.*

2025 is not a year that I look back on with undiluted fondness.

It was not quite an *annus horribilis* as the late Queen Elizabeth II described 1992—a year of personal troubles and royal upheaval—but it was a difficult year for me, replete with wilderness moments. I was being terrorized by two vituperative managers who professed to have my best interests at heart. Neither did. Meanwhile, I endured their unsubtle insults, veiled threats, and verbal abuse. Such as my immediate manager telling me that if I didn't get "it" (not the precise word, but it rhymes) together I was not going to be recommended for promotion, and from another manager, "If I wanted to, I could take you out in a week."

I felt there was nothing I could do right, and I was never going to be good enough, as if I was struggling against a riptide. My district manager told me I was not high on his list for promotion either. Nice. And then, the icing on the cake, the store closed the 27th of December. Permanently.

Remembering the madness, needless drama, and messiness of 2025, I surmise those who witnessed Christ's crucifixion weren't expecting to be thrust into their own wildernesses, either. For the Disciples, the two Marys, and countless others, it was indeed dark days with seemingly no glimmer of hope. False accusations resulted in Jesus' subsequent death sentence. Isn't that what cowards and the insecure tend to do? Transfer blame away from themselves and falsely onto others? Yes, it is.

Extracting the root word from *wilderness*, all involved must have thought this was a *wild*, unfathomable circumstance. Jesus, at the height of his ministry, dead because he was labeled a threat. The proverbial "they" did not want any perceived competition or someone questioning their knowledge or authority. But not even death could quell the power of The Almighty. The bright hope and glittering light of the resurrection keeps my faith alive, keeps me moving forward, and illumines my path in the wilderness. It is my hope that 2026 will be an *annus mirabilis*.

Chris, being in a better work environment, is grateful. He wishes his St. Luke's family a blessed, contemplative Lent and a bright, joyous Easter.

Scripture Readings for Lenten 2026

Daily Office (BCP)

WEEK OF LAST EPIPHANY

Ash Wednesday, February 14

Amos 5:6-15

Hebrews 12:1-14

Luke 18:9-14

Thursday

Habakkuk

3:1-10 (11-15) 16-18

Philippians 3:12-21

John 17:1-8

Friday

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Philippians 4:1-9

John 17:9-19

Saturday

Ezekiel 39:21-29

Philippians 4:10-20

John 17:20-26

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Sunday, February 22

Dan. 9:3-10

Heb. 2:10-18

John 12:44-50

Monday

Gen. 37:1-11

1 Cor. 1:1-19

Mark 1:1-13

Tuesday

Gen. 37:12-24

1 Cor. 1:20-31

Mark 1:14-28

Wednesday

Gen. 37:25-36

1 Cor. 2:1-13

Mark 1:29-45

Thursday

Gen. 39:1-23

1 Cor. 2:14--3:15

Mark 2:1-12

Friday

Gen. 40:1-23

1 Cor. 3:16-23

Mark 2:13-22

Saturday

Gen. 41:1-13

1 Cor. 4:1-7

Mark 2:23-3:6

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Sunday, March 1

Gen. 41:14–45

Rom. 6:3–14

John 5:19–24

Monday

Gen. 41:46–57

1 Cor. 4:8–20(21)

Mark 3:7–19a

Tuesday

Gen. 42:1–17

1 Cor. 5:1–8

Mark 3:19b–35

Wednesday

Gen. 42:18–28

1 Cor. 5:9–6:8

Mark 4:1–20

Thursday

Gen. 42:29–38

1 Cor. 6:12–20

Mark 4:21–34

Friday

Gen. 43:1–15

1 Cor. 7:1–9

Mark 4:35–41

Saturday

Gen. 43:16–34

1 Cor. 7:10–24

Mark 5:1–20

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Sunday, March 8

Gen. 44:1–17

Rom. 8:1–10

John 5:25–29

Monday

Gen. 44:18–34

1 Cor. 7:25–31

Mark 5:21–43

Tuesday

Gen. 45:1–15

1 Cor. 7:32–40

Mark 6:1–13

Wednesday

Gen. 45:16–28

1 Cor. 8:1–13

Mark 6:13–29

Thursday

Gen. 46:1–7, 28–34

1 Cor. 9:1–15

Mark 6:30–46

Friday

Gen. 47:1–26

1 Cor. 9:16–27

Mark 6:47–56

Saturday

Gen. 47:27–48:7

1 Cor. 10:1–13

Mark 7:1–23

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Sunday, March 15

Gen. 48:8–22

Rom. 8:11–25

John 6:27–40

Monday

Gen. 49:1–28

1 Cor. 10:14–11:1

Mark 7:24–37

Tuesday

Gen. 49:29–50:14

1 Cor. 11:17–34

Mark 8:1–10

Wednesday

Gen. 50:15–26

1 Cor. 12:1–11

Mark 8:11–26

Thursday

Exod. 1:6–22

1 Cor. 12:12–26

Mark 8:27–9:1

Friday

Exod. 2:1–22

1 Cor. 12:27–13:3

Mark 9:2–13

Saturday

Exod. 2:23–3:15

1 Cor. 13:1–13

Mark 9:14–29

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Sunday, March 22

Exod. 3:16–4:12

Rom. 12:1–21

John 8:46–59

Monday

Exod. 4:10–20(21–26)27–31

1 Cor. 14:1–19

Mark 9:30–41

Tuesday

Exod. 5:1–6:1

1 Cor. 14:20–33a, 39–40

Mark 9:42–50

Wednesday

Exod. 7:8–24

2 Cor. 2:14–3:6

Mark 10:1–16

Thursday

Exod. 7:25–8:19

2 Cor. 3:7–18

Mark 10:17–31

Friday

Exod. 9:13–35

2 Cor. 4:1–12

Mark 10:32–45

Saturday

Exod. 10:21–11:8

2 Cor. 4:13–18

Mark 10:46–52

PALM SUNDAY

Sunday, March 29

Zech. 9:9-12

1 Tim. 6:12-16

Luke 19:41-48

HOLY SATURDAY

Saturday, April 4

Lam. 3:37-58

Heb. 4:1-16

Rom. 8:1-11

HOLY WEEK

Monday, March 30

Lam. 1:1-2, 6-12

2 Cor. 1:1-7

Mark 11:12-25

Tuesday

Lam. 1:17-22

2 Cor. 1:8-22

Mark 11:27-33

Wednesday

Lam. 2:1-9

2 Cor. 1:23-2:11

Mark 12:1-11

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Thursday, April 2

Lam. 2:10-18

1 Cor. 10:14-17; 11:27-32

Mark 14:12-25

GOOD FRIDAY

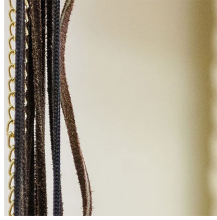
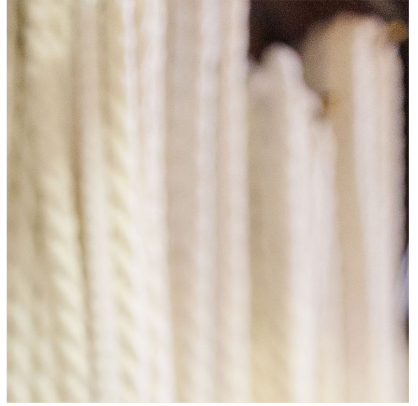
Friday, April 3

Lam. 3:1-9, 19-33

1 Pet. 1:10-20

John 13:36-38

John 19:38-42



HOLY WEEK & EASTER SERVICES

Palm Sunday, March 29

8 a.m. | 9 a.m. | 11:15 a.m.

Holy Wednesday, April 1

7 p.m. | The Office of Tenebrae

Maundy Thursday, April 2

6 p.m. | Agape Meal

7 p.m. | Maundy Thursday Service

Good Friday, April 3

9 a.m. | Stations of the Cross from St. Luke's to the Capitol

12 p.m. | The Three Hours

7 p.m. | Good Friday Liturgy

Holy Saturday, April 4

8 p.m. | The Great Vigil

Easter Day, April 5

8 & 9 a.m. | Worship

10:15 a.m. | Easter Egg Hunt

11:15 a.m. | Worship

Details | stlukesatlanta.org







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