



Homily, September 13, 2020
Reverend Salvatore Sapienza

“Well, as you can see from this beautiful banner behind me, we are celebrating God's creation this month at Douglas UCC. And today we are focusing on the theme of ‘forest wilderness.’

“The dictionary describes the word ‘wilderness’ as a tract or region, uncultivated, and uninhabited by humans, an area essentially undisturbed by human activity. And so the "wilderness" describes those places in creation where humans have had very little presence, or minimal impact. They are those places which remain, for the most part, just as God created them -- uncultivated, uninhabited, undisturbed.

“Sadly, many of these undisturbed natural places have been shrinking and disappearing over the years. When our country was first founded, most of the US was wilderness. Today, wilderness covers only two percent of the land. And that has done tremendous damage to the ecosystem, which sustains all of life.

“Scientists tell us that most of our environmental problems today -- things like climate change, the extinction of animal and plant species, the collapse of fisheries, the shrinkage of freshwater supplies, and the loss of forests, can all be attributed to our human abuse and overuse of nature's bounty, to our failure to respect the resources of the natural world.

“More than 50 years ago, during the administration of Lyndon Baines Johnson, the US government worked to protect what was left of the US wilderness. They established what was known as the Wilderness Act of 1964, which protected more than 9 million acres of wilderness in the US. Of the Act, President Johnson said, ‘If future generations are to remember us more with gratitude than sorrow, we must achieve more than just the miracles of technology. We must also leave them a glimpse of the world as it was created, not just as it looked when we got through with it.’

“Sadly, during our current administration, some of this protected land has been eliminated and opened up for industrial purposes, like logging and mining. And I am baffled as to why so many Christians in America today can't seem to care about this instruction for God's creation, for scripture calls us to be good stewards of the Earth's resources. Scripture tells us time and time again that it is in the wilderness that we experience the presence of God.

“The Wilderness is referred to more than 300 times in the Bible. It is a central aspect of our Judeo-Christian tradition. And the wilderness plays a vital role in the spiritual journeys of biblical figures like Moses and John the Baptist, and Jesus. All of them experienced the presence and the power of God during their time in the wilderness.

“Hosea 2 says, ‘The wilderness will lead you to your heart, where I will speak.’ In Luke 3, we hear ‘The Word of God came to John the Baptist in the wilderness,’ and in Luke 4 we hear that ‘Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness.’

“Now some of you may be familiar with the transcendentalists. The transcendentalists were a group in the early 1900's -- people like

Emerson and Thoreau and Whitman. They believed that we could experience the presence of God by venturing into the wilderness.

“In his essay, *Nature*, Emerson wrote about his time in the wilderness, he said, ‘Standing on the bare ground, my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball. I am nothing. I see all the currents of the Universal being circulate through me. I am part and parcel of God.’

“In the wilderness, we lose ourselves in order to find ourselves. We lose that ego part of ourselves, and we connect with the presence of the Divine that is with us and within us.

“The father of our national parks, John Muir, said, ‘The clearest way into the universe is through a forest wilderness.’ Venturing into the wilderness is a part of our spiritual journey. It's part of our spiritual growth. Symbolically or spiritually, the wilderness represents our going to an undisturbed place so that we can experience God's presence.

“Jesus told us that the kingdom of God is within us. And so spiritually, venturing into the wilderness means venturing within, to that still, undisturbed place within us, where we can attune ourselves more fully to God's voice, and experience God's presence and God's power. Meditation is entering into the wilderness of the soul.

“And so my friends on this Creation Sunday, I want to encourage each and every one of you to find time each day this week to venture into the wilderness, be it a literal Journey Into the woods, or a spiritual journey within, and let us recommit ourselves to doing everything we can to protect and nurture the wilderness,

both the physical wilderness around us and the spiritual wilderness within. For it is in the wilderness, where we return to who we are, to what we are. It is in the wilderness, where we return again, to the land of our soul.

“Namaste.”

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<https://duccpodcast.wordpress.com/2020/09/13/season-of-creation-forest-and-wilderness/>

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<https://youtu.be/rMdXpSIQhg4>

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