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Resilient: Faith for the Wilderness

Lent, we say, is an invitation to journey with Jesus through the wilderness. “The wilderness” is a thick metaphor. In one sense, it is our way of describing the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness and being tempted by Satan. It is also a metaphor to describe “the way of the cross”—that long, hard journey. More broadly, the number 40 makes us think of the 40 years God’s people journeyed through the wilderness, making their way to the Promised Land.

In every instance, we find that those who journey through the wilderness must be people of resilient faith.

Depending on who you ask, you’ll get a different description of resilience. Ecologists say resilience is “the capacity of a system or enterprise to absorb disturbance and reorganize so that it retains its core purpose and identity in the face of dramatically changed circumstances.”

Mental health experts tell us resilience is “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors.”

We can all look to this past year and name more than our fair share of disturbances, adversities, and stressors.

Dr. C. Kavin Rowe, at Duke Divinity School, helpfully writes, “Resilience in the Christian sense is a kind of lived hope, a way to keep getting up again that has its roots in God’s permanent faithfulness.”

Resilient faith—the kind that gets us through the wilderness—is a whole-hearted faith that knows what it is to lament and to rejoice, to doubt and to believe, to see God’s kingdom flourish in some places and be rejected in others, to lose our life in order to find it, to face death and hope in the resurrection.

In the gospel according to Mark, we encounter Jesus who shows us the cruciform shape of resilient faith. Jesus invites us to follow him in the way of the cross—a life of trust, faithfulness, self-emptying love, and servanthood—which leads to life.

This Lent, we invite you on a journey of resilience. In this booklet, we share some ideas to help nurture our faith for the wilderness and fill our reservoirs of resilience.

The calendar for daily prayer and scripture reading takes us all the way through the gospel according to Mark. Every Sunday in Lent, the sermon will come from Mark.

As you look through this booklet, you may have other ideas about how you might draw from and cultivate a resilient faith this Lent.

I pray in this season, as we journey with Jesus toward the cross, that God’s Spirit would strengthen our faith for the wilderness, so that we might be a people of hope who always sing:

“Every day to us is Easter,
With its resurrection song.”

Abiding in Christ,
Pastor Wil

Table of Contents

Daily Prayer and Scripture Reading.....	4
Daily Examen.....	5
Calendar of Daily Readings.....	6
Lenten Disciplines for Resilient Faith.....	7
Prayers and Scripture Readings for Resilience.....	8-9

Daily Prayer and Scripture Reading

Whether first thing in the morning, over lunch, or whenever you can set apart time, dedicating time to be with God through prayer and scripture reading is a way to fill our reservoirs of faith and friendship with God. The daily scripture readings take us on a slow read through the gospel according to Mark, where, in Jesus, we see the cruciform shape of resilient faith.

O Lord, let my soul rise up to meet you, as the day rises to meet the sun.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Amen.

Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.

Daily scripture reading

What is going on in this passage?
What do you want to teach me in this reading?
How do you want me to respond today?
Rest in the presence of God.

Pray for others:

Prayer or Scripture reading for resilience:

consider offering one of the prayers listed, or your own

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Daily Examen

The nightly examen is a practice coming from St. Ignatius. The examen is meant to be a prayerful guide that helps us see God in all things, and to entrust all things to God. This daily examen draws from the traditions of the church, including the service of Compline in "Book of Common Prayer." You may do this alone, or as part of a nightly reflection with those in your household or with a friend. The Lord Almighty grant us a peaceful night and a perfect end. Amen.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. -Matthew 11:28-30

Review our day:

What are you grateful for today?

When did you receive love? When did you share love?
When did you feel most alive?

When did you feel apart from God?
When did you feel overwhelmed or anxious?

Where will you need the Lord's help tomorrow?
What are you looking forward to tomorrow?

Into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O Lord, O God of truth.
-Ps. 31:5

You may want to offer one or more of the following prayers:

Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Look down, O Lord, from your heavenly throne, and illumine this night with your celestial brightness; that by night as by day your people may glorify your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen.

Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping;
That awake we may watch with Christ,
And asleep we may rest in peace.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Daily Scripture Readings

Feb. 17 - Ash Wednesday

Mark 1:1-15
Mark 1:16-20
Mark 1:21-34
Mark 1:35-45

Feb. 21 - 1st Sunday of Lent

Mark 8:27-35; 10:28-31

Mark 2:1-12
Mark 2:13-22
Mark 2:23-3:6
Mark 3:7-3:19a
Mark 3:19b-35
Mark 4:1-9

Feb. 28 - 2nd Sunday of Lent

Mark 9:14-29

Mark 4:10-20
Mark 4:21-34
Mark 4:35-41
Mark 5:1-20
Mark 5:21-43
Mark 6:1-13

March 7 - 3rd Sunday of Lent

Mark 10:35-52

Mark 6:14-29
Mark 6:30-44
Mark 6:45-56
Mark 7:1-23
Mark 7:24-30
Mark 7:31-37

March 14 - 4th Sunday of Lent

Mark 12:28-34

Mark 8:1-10
Mark 8:11-26
Mark 8:27-30
Mark 8:31-9:1
Mark 9:2-13
Mark 9:14-29

March 21 - 5th Sunday of Lent

Mark 13:1-8, 32-37

Mark 9:30-32
Mark 9:33-50
Mark 10:1-16
Mark 10:17-31
Mark 10:32-45
Mark 10:46-52

March 28 - Palm Sunday

Mark 11:1-11

Holy Week

Mark 11:12-19
Mark 11:20-13:37
Mark 14:1-11
Mark 14:12-72
Mark 15:1-47
Silence - Be Still

April - 4th Easter Sunday

Mark 16:1-8

Lenten Disciplines for Resilient Faith

Typically, in this season, we commend the observance of a holy Lent through such practices like self-examination, repentance, prayer, fasting, self-denial, and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word. The importance of those disciplines still holds true.

Daily prayer and Scripture reflection are vitally important habits for cultivating a resilient faith. Through those means of grace, we deepen our friendship with God, and grow in our trust in and faithfulness to God.

This year, let me also commend to you the following disciplines that I pray will help fill your reservoirs for resilient faith. Consider taking on one of these disciplines:

Hope

- Plant seeds—vegetable and/or flower—let each one be an act of hope. (* Bonus: share what you grow when the time comes)
- Guerilla gardening: find a forgotten or unloved place and sow seeds or plant flowers there
- Learn how you can volunteer—even in a pandemic—through local ministries that offer hope (for example—Pacesetters for youth, REACH, Renewed Hope, Hurlburt-Johnson Friendship House, Cherokee Co. Jail)
- Call someone who may be feeling lonely and just visit for a while

Friendship/Community*

- Schedule a weekly walk with a friend
- Start a text messaging thread with friends or family members, and keep it alive every day. Maybe you check in, encourage each other, or simply share silly memes.
- Plan a Zoom dinner party where you set your phone or computer up on the table at the same time as other families or friends
- Invite someone to join with you in Sunday worship. Message, call, or chat back and forth about what you're hearing from God during the service
- If you are fasting through the week, make sure you also embrace the discipline of feasting on Sunday—share as much of that as you can with others:

What other ideas do you have?

*When it comes to “corporate disciplines”—things we do together—the trick in this season is to also be mindful to take COVID precautions.

Prayers for Resilience:

Serenity Prayer (short)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Serenity Prayer (long)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.

Lord, your Word promises that you “will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint.” Your Truth nourishes the root of our hearts, helping us bloom in the desert. Your love revitalizes us when circumstances threaten to dehydrate our faith. When we are surrounded by the dryness of uncertainties, fears, or change, saturate us with Your presence, pour Your peace into every fiber of our being until we radiate with resilience. No matter where you have us planted, help us bloom for Your glory. We love you. We need you. We praise you. In Jesus’s name, we pray. Amen.

-Unknown author, quoted in Jesuit prayer resource (www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource)

O Lord, this is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own. Amen.

-prayer from St. Archbishop Oscar Romero

Scripture Readings for Resilience:

2 Corinthians 4:7-12

⁷But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ¹¹For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. ¹²So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Romans 5:1-5

¹Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Psalm 121

A Song of Ascents.

¹I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
²My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
³He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
⁴He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
⁵The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
⁶The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
⁷The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
⁸The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

Notes:



The mission of First United Methodist Church is to grow disciples who know God personally, pray daily, celebrate worship, serve others, and reach out in witness.