

# Gifts of the Dark Wood

When I first selected this lenten series for our congregation I had No idea what we were about to face. I never imagined I would be standing here in an empty room just Lisa and I filming a service for you. I had know idea what the Dark Wood might look like and how formative and real it might be for us. I am going to invite you for a moment into a prayer reflection with the threshold song and prayer I would have entered into worship with today. Because if there is anything we are doing right now it is walking an unknown path. And it has made me wonder, truly wonder what God is calling us to.

*There's a path... though it winds its way through darkness  
We would choose... to avoid it if we could  
We awake...to an unexpected calling  
God says, "come... there are gifts in the Dark Wood"*

## Scripture

*Corinthians 5: 16-19, NRSV*

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

## Contemporary Reading

The Spirit beckons us not to be good, but to be human—humble, of the *humus*—which ultimately means finding your elemental waters, which are connected to God, and living into your fullest energies. You can (and will) do a lot of good by walking the path that brings you most fully alive in this world, but in order to stay on this path, you must learn to say no to doing a great many “good” things. - Eric Elnes (117)

## WE RESPOND

Eric Elnes the author of Gifts of the Darkwood in which this series is designed out of is currently in isolation because he has tested positive for the Corona virus. He is begging us all to walk a new path because he himself isn't very sick and he was just wise enough to go in and get tested because he knew he might have been exposed. He's in the US and at that time he returned from a trip to Spain they were

testing travellers. You can look it up it is a perfect example of how we need to take care of one another at this time and why churches are being recommended to do worship at a distance just like we are today. But lets look at what he has to say for us as we journey in the Darkwood. Elnes writes “Our journey through life is never a straight one, even if we are paying attention to our sweet-spot moments.” Even if we are trying to live our fullest best lives out of who God has created us to be would be my translation of that. “The path zigzags. Sometimes it heads in the exact opposite direction we think it should.” Sometimes we discover we have to walk in an entirely new direction or alter our path entirely.... We would probably be fine if God would just give us the itinerary. Instead, at each point where the journey needs to make a turn we start to feel increasingly lost.” I know some of you are feeling that now. It might even feel a bit trite for me to even say this stuff. Some of you feel like the journey is ending, others haven’t even noticed a change -except when you couldn’t find you favourite veggie at Save-on this week. The journey is different for each one of us all the time. But today it is different for the whole world.

For me at times in the past when I think I have gotten lost on the path I usually find myself paying more careful attention to the prompts of the spirit. I pray and I meditate longer and with greater attention. I listen to my gut more than the outside chaos. I try to make decisions out of those deep internal places rather than let others make decisions for me. And...I seek the council of friends and mentors those that have proven themselves to be trustworthy. At some point the lightning starts flashing and the thunder starts crashing, revealing a particular way forward and confirming that I can trust the direction. I don’t always get it right. Sometimes I have to reassess or backtrack and do the whole process over again until I make the next right step. But the point is, even though I get it wrong sometimes, I would be completely off course in the zigzag path of life if I didn’t experience regular periods of feeling lost that alert me to pay attention. That remind me of how to listen and how to know who I am and the call on my life. I know a lot of people who are feeling this lostness right now. Attempting to discern what is right and what is wrong for themselves, for others, we seem to be called upon right now to fix the whole world but I want us all to focus back and remember we can only do ‘us’ we can only do our part and for some of us that is easier to figure out than others.

In his poem “Lost” David Wagoner eloquently describes what to do when you find yourself lost:

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you  
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here.  
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger.  
Must ask permission to know it and be known.

The forest breathes. Listen. It answers. I have made this place around you.  
If you leave it you may come back again. Saying Here.  
No two trees are the same to Raven.  
No two branches are the same to Wren.  
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you.  
You are surely lost. Stand Still.  
The Forest knows Where you are. You must let it find you.”

We are here. I have heard some of your voices this week (I have heard my own).  
What should I do? Where do I go? How will I get through?  
I have seen steady companions be pulled together and I have seen the stress tear people away from one another. Dear God help, show me a sign. Should I stay home from work? Should I lay off my staff? Should I go visit my friends? Should I send my family home or should we stay together? Should I shut down my business? Someone tell me what to do?  
Should I send my child to childcare? Why am I so nervous to even go to the grocery store? Why are my children bossing me around all of a sudden? Why don't my parents get it? .... Okay God. I'm listening.  
If we were to have read the lectionary reading for today you would have heard the story of the blind man who Jesus healed by putting mud in his eyes. People were asking why is he blind “who sinned he or his parents” and Jesus says “that's not the point” “neither.”  
If there was ever a time when theology can get skewed it is right now! Whatever fight for your life or sanity you are fighting you have not been given this because you have sinned. And please don't let anyone tell you that or tell you that a certain race or nationality did this because it is just not true. I don't know why and I'm not going to try to explain it (at least not today)  
Jesus doesn't want to talk about *why*. What's important to know is that “the works of God” are about to become manifest to all.  
It is time for us to look for the signs of God's presence in the world. Look for the helpers, the people who care. Discover the crocus and the buds on the trees. I went to the beach with my family the other day because I had to get my children away from the house. We were isolating and at that point their friends were not. I heard my daughter laugh - and I started to take a video and then when I watched it back I heard myself laugh. I have not heard myself laugh in a very long time. Life hasn't been funny for awhile. And in the midst of the chaos and the uncertainty and the isolation I found myself thanking God for that moment. My family and I are isolated because our world is consumed with an infectious disease and I am laughing. Okay God. I'm going to keep opening my eyes.

It is easy to explain the work of God away but I honestly believe God works more in our intuitions, nudges and acts of kindness than in supernatural phenomena. I can't lie for those of you who are struggling wondering how you are going to pay your mortgage for your house or the rent for your business I don't imagine checks are going to drop from the sky (I honestly wish they would) but don't stand there waiting. But watch. I know the Spirit is listening and people are listening and I pray, oh I pray for everyone of you.

In these next weeks and months I won't be surprised if I start to hear people telling me about the Spirit sending them "wake up calls" and "ah ha moments." And I beg you please do share them.

Perhaps in this season we are to sit and wait a little more, perhaps we are to be like Samuel sleeping awakened by God's voice and when you hear the nudge of hope, or the nudge of a call to help may we say "Here I am Lord."

The noise is loud. I pray we will all begin to figure out how to live into this new normal so that we can hear the Spirit call. We are in uncertain times and I don't have any ability to explain it. But I know how we are called to respond. "Love God, Love your neighbour and love yourself."

Amen.

## **Prayers of the People**

"Come and Rest"

*I want to invite you into a time of prayer together now.  
Come and Rest.*

*Come and rest (echo: come and rest)*

*Come and listen (echo: come and listen)*

*Lay the fullness of your lives before the Maker (echo is a canon)*

*Weave intercessions...*

There are many people who are walking the Dark Woods for various reasons.

Let us lift up names of those who need our prayers...

*[allow time for this and when the naming stops...]*

God, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

There are many places in this world where people are hurting.

Let us lift up names of places in this world that need our prayers...

*[allow time for this and when the naming stops...]*

God, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

*Come and rest (echo: come and rest)*

*Come and listen (echo: come and listen)  
Lay the fullness of your lives before the Maker (echo is a canon)*

*In this time of COVID-19, we pray:  
When we aren't sure, God, help us be calm;  
when information comes from all sides, correct and not, help us to discern;  
when fear makes it hard to breathe, and anxiety seems to be the order of the day,  
slow us down, God; help us to reach out with our hearts,  
when we can't touch with our hands;  
help us to be socially connected, when we have to be socially distant;  
help us to love as perfectly as we can, knowing that "perfect love casts out all fear."  
For the doctors, we pray,  
for the nurses, we pray,  
for the technicians and the janitors and the  
aides and the caregivers, we pray,  
for the researchers and theorists,  
the epidemiologists and investigators, and inspectors  
for those who are sick, and those who are grieving, we pray,  
for all who are affected, all around the world...  
we pray  
for safety, for health, for wholeness.  
May we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty,  
clothe the naked and house those without homes;  
may we walk with those who feel they are alone,  
and may we do all that we can to heal  
the sick—  
in spite of the epidemic,  
in spite of the fear.  
Help us, O God,  
that we might help each other.  
In the love of the Creator,  
in the name of the Healer,  
in the life of the Holy Spirit that is in all and with all,  
we pray.  
May it be so. Amen.*

**So wherever you may be today know this:**

You have a place in this world; a place where everything comes together in your body and you disappear into a seamless whole. Get over [whatever shortcomings afflict you] and inhabit this world with your fullest self.

Please speak the words in bold when we get to them:

**May the Spirit of the Living God,  
Made known to us most fully within life's Dark Wood:**

**Go before you** to show you the way;  
**Go above you** to watch over you;  
**Go behind you** to push you into places you may not necessarily go yourself;  
**Go beneath you** to uphold and uplift you;  
**Go beside you** to be your strong and constant companion;

And dwell within you to remind you that you are surely not alone,  
And that you are loved—loved beyond your wildest imagination.  
And may the fire of God's blessing burn brightly Upon you, and within you,  
Now and always.

**Amen.**

### **Benediction Song**

*There's a path (there's a path) ... and it leads us out together  
To the wood (to the wood) ... where the darkness hovers still  
We are sent (we are sent) ... and the Spirit goes before us  
God says, "go (God says, go) ... be my presence in the world."*