

Opening Worship Friday VCM 2021

CALL TO WORSHIP

Call to Worship

One: God hovered over the void and breathed life into dust.

All: **God created in the wilderness.**

One: The Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years.

All: **The Israelites found God in the wilderness.**

One: Jesus said “no” to the tempter time and time again.

All: **Jesus claimed his identity in the wilderness.**

One: We grow in the wilderness. We learn in the wilderness.

All: **For God is with us—before, through, and after the wilderness.**

One: Let us worship God!

All: **Amen.**

A reading from Isaiah 40.1-11:

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,

and cry to her that she has served her term,

that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.’

A voice says, ‘Cry out!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’

All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever.

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;

lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
 lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'
 See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him;
 his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.
 He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms,
 and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

(Name) will lead the reading of the Canticle - A Song of the Wilderness Isaiah
 35:1-7,10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
 the desert shall rejoice and blossom;

**It shall blossom abundantly,
 and rejoice with joy and singing.**

They shall see the glory of the Lord,
 the majesty of our God.

**Strengthen the weary hands,
 and make firm the feeble knees.**

Say to the anxious, "Be strong, do not fear!
 Here is your God, coming with judgment to save you."

**Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened,
 and the ears of the deaf be unstopped.**

Then shall the lame leap like a deer,
 and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

**For waters shall break forth in the wilderness
 and streams in the desert;**

The burning sand shall become a pool
 and the thirsty ground, springs of water.

**The ransomed of God shall return with singing,
 with everlasting joy upon their heads.**

Joy and gladness shall be theirs,
 and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

(Name) will lead us in the Prayers of the People

God, we are in the wilderness.

As much as we have tried to map, domesticate, and routinize every inch of your creation and every moment of our lives, we know our maps do not tell us where we are with you, and that our schedules often serve to distract us from the reality that we ourselves and so many of our neighbours on this planet are in the wilderness, too. And so we pray:

Here, in this wilderness, prepare your way, O God.

With all persons kept in poverty or slavery, all who are in fear from abusers, terrorists, and oppressors, all who face addiction of any kind, and all who are targeted for unjust treatment because of who they are, we pray:

Here, in this wilderness, prepare your way, O God.

With leaders in religious, political, economic, and social life; with our families, friends, and neighbors; and with all who work to sustain and protect our lives as military, civilian workers, and first responders, we pray:

Here, in this wilderness, prepare your way, O God.

With all who need your healing power and with all who offer healing through their skill and presence, we pray:

Here, in this wilderness, prepare your way, O God.

Receive the prayers of your people, most merciful God, and remain with us in these wilderness times. Grant us comfort and courage to restore relationships among God's people and God's created earth. **Amen.**

Please join me in a closing prayer:

Almighty God, thank you that in the wilderness you provided the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, and you continue to signpost the way ahead for each one of us today. We pray for the eyes and the heart to see and respond to your leading, even when we don't know where we are going or what lies ahead. Our trust is in you, Father. Amen.