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Title: Braving the Wilderness: Wherever You Go

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Text: [Exodus 33:12-19](#)

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We've been in a sermon series called Braving the Wilderness: Living During Uncertain Times looking at how we live during this difficult and uncertain time through the lens of the story of the Israelites in their 40-year journey from captivity to the Promised Land.

At this point in the journey, God has made the promise to dwell in the midst of the Israelites, from the wilderness to the Promise Land and onward. God has become a visible presence to them in the form of the tabernacle or the ark of the covenant. God would be present with them in a real and tangible way.

Now, there has been a bit of a falling out, the people have fallen in love with a golden calf idol rather than God, God then calls the people stubborn and God is deciding whether or not to change the nature of their relationship. The people have already had trouble hearing and following the voice and direction of God, and it appears God will not be quite as present. They have to be asking the question- **What kind of God are we dealing with here?**

This is when Moses decides to have a talk with God: He feels like God has some explaining to do.

Moses said to the Lord, "Look, you've been telling me, Lead these people forward. But you haven't told me whom you will send with me. Yet, you've assured me "I know you by name and think highly of you." Now if you do think highly of me, show me your ways so that I may know your ways so that I may know you and so that you may really approve of me. Remember too that this nation is your people. The Lord replied, "I'll go myself and I'll help you." (Exodus 33:12-14)

Moses convinces God to go, to be present. But he also asks for something else, "show me your ways." I want to know how you work. Why can it be difficult to know exactly what you would have us do? You have assured us of your presence, yet we can't see you. We can't hear you. Moses continues his questioning of God

Moses said, "please show me your glorious presence. The Lord said, "I'll make all my goodness pass in front of you, and I'll proclaim before you the name The Lord. I will be kind to whomever I wish to be kind, and I will have compassion to whomever I wish to be compassionate. But the Lord said, "you can't see my face because no one can see my face and live." (Exodus 33:18-20)

Moses is wanting God to be his guide through the wilderness.

We want God to be our guide through the wilderness. In fact, it goes past a mere desire to have God along for the ride, rather we want to trust God to guide us.

And when we don't hear direct orders or when our path isn't clear, God seems hidden.

Moses is asking to hear the voice of God, to see the presence of God, wherever they may go.

And like you may have felt at some point even though God was present, God remained hidden. When you prayed for direction, there was silence. When you sought the voice of God, you heard nothing.

Even at our greatest points of belief, we need proof, we needed that tangible sign.

In the wilderness, when the ground is shifting beneath us, when we need to hear a word from the Lord the most, God seems absent.

We keep coming back to just how much has been going on in our communities and our lives during this year. There are days when it's difficult to get out of bed. Many days, the most courageous thing we've been able to do is put two feet on the floor. All we want for our lives is to simply see God, to hear the voice of God.

Long ago, in the desert, the Israelites discovered it wasn't that God had a problem speaking, rather they had a problem in listening. They had missed the part where God tells Moses that I will make all my goodness pass before you.

In Bucktown, Maryland, there is literally nothing. Nothing except an old historical marker that says, "On a farm near here, lived the slave Harriet Tubman, who gained the freedom for herself and 300 other slaves. She was called the Moses of her people." When she escaped that farm the day before she fled, she announced to the whole farm that she was running away. She of course could not do it out loud, for that would have put her life in obvious danger. She walked around the farm and sang an old hymn. One really had to listen to know what she was singing about. I'll meet you in the morning, I'm going to the promised land. As soon as she escaped, she began to think

about how she could return and free more slaves. She sent a letter to the farm announcing that she was returning. She of course had to do this in code. She sent a letter to one of the literate slaves, who received the letter only after the plantation owner had read it and found nothing wrong with it. The slave read it to the others. "Read this letter to the others and give my best to the old folks. Tell my brothers and sister to always be watching in prayer." When the good old ship Zion comes along, be ready to jump on board."

Harriet Tubman is one of the great liberators in history, but to hear her, you had to be really listening.

As God worked through Harriett Tubman, God shows us an eternal truth. Yes, God is always present and in order to truly hear the voice of God, you have to be really listening. In order to see the presence of God, you have to truly be paying attention.

How are you listening for the voice of God? Are you being intentional about making time and making space for the voice of God?

In wilderness time, when life seems uncertain, we struggle to believe. Perhaps we get so busy trying to make everything right, that we forget to listen. We stop seeing. We might even think that the mercy and grace of God will be no help to us.

But when we stop. Stop, take a moment, take more than a moment, we can hear the voice of God. We can see the presence of God. Yes, we hear God in those moments of silence we take. Richard Rohr is right on when he says, silence is the primary language of God

Perhaps we hear the voice of God in those whom we love.

Perhaps we hear the voice of God in the wisdom of a trusted confidant or a child.

Perhaps we hear the voice of God in someone who is giving voice to the voiceless

Perhaps we hear the voice of God in catching up with a friend, sharing together in a long-lost memory.

Maybe what Abraham Maslow writes resonates with you that "the great lesson is that the sacred is in the ordinary, that it is to be found in one's daily life, in one's neighbors, friends, family, and in one's back yard." God's graciousness passes before us each day.

I suspect many of us has probably spent more time in the last few months in those ordinary places, our back yard's, our front yards, seeing neighbors out.

If God was easy to hear or if it was easy to know all we needed to know about God, would God be worthy of giving our lives to? The Good News in the Wilderness is this: There is always more to the story. There is always more to know. There is always more to be experienced. The graciousness of God continues to unfold before us. The glimpses and whispers of God's love are enough to see us through.

Will you pray with me?