

Pastoral Reflection – Company in the Wilderness **Susanne Guenther Loewen, April 29, 2020**

Last week, our household went on a family hike out in the country, in my father-in-law's empty pasture. It was so calming and peaceful to walk in the quiet grass, with the warm Spring sun shining down on us. From recent phone calls and emails, it sounds like many of you are also finding the warmer weather uplifting, and are taking walks either alone or two metres apart from a friend or relative. Spending time outside – even sitting on a balcony or by an open window – has become one thing we can do to restore our souls in these unusual times of pandemic.

It reminded me of some Lenten reflections I'd read a few months back on Jesus' practice of spending time in the wilderness.¹ Writer Tamara Shantz says that she used to think of the wilderness "as an absence of anything. Jesus, alone in the middle of nowhere, focused on fasting and prayer." But, she continues, "surely there is no such thing as 'nowhere' from an ecological perspective. Jesus was present to a very particular place during those 40 days. There were particular rocks, soils, animals, perhaps meadow grass and other plants, sharing those days with him. Jesus was anything but alone. He was being held, supported, perhaps encouraged by this wilderness. He was experiencing communion, just not with other humans. *Could it be that Jesus' capacity to pray for 40 days and be grounded in the face of temptation came from this spiritual community of the wilderness?*"

So as we walk in or observe nature this week (with physical distancing or "loving distancing," according to Shantz!), I invite us to notice the plants and animals keeping us company in the absence of in-person human community. May we, too, find comfort, strength, and hope in knowing we are not alone as we continue on our particular wilderness journey.

¹ See Tamara Shantz, "Into the Wilderness: Lenten Reflections," *Pastors in Exile* blog (Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario): <https://pastorsinexile.org/2020/02/28/5387/>. She talks about "loving distancing" here: <https://pastorsinexile.org/2020/03/27/into-the-wilderness-not-so-lonely-anymore/>