



# The wisdom of the wilderness

Caroline Hodgson *reflects on* Deuteronomy 26:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13

Today's reading from Deuteronomy finds Moses, now an old man, addressing the Israelites. After forty nomadic years, finally the Promised Land is within sight. After scrabbling around in the desert for food and water, pitching tent and striking camp, worshipping at makeshift, portable altars – how desperate the people must be to cross over into the “land flowing with milk and honey” and to celebrate God’s “bounty”. At last they will be able to grow and harvest food and give thanks for it before a real, solid altar.

Perhaps it's unsurprising that the passage contains strong words of entitlement – “inheritance... possess... settle”. Over three thousand years of history have taught us, however, that when you “settle” and “possess” land, it generally involves displacing somebody, and that if you want to maintain your idyllic life, sooner or later you need to establish borders and build barriers. The people whom Moses is addressing would surely be horrified to know how history has unfolded.

## The ordination of women

### Part 1 – “called to bring my whole self”

by Ricarda Witcombe

*Four Sunday Link writers share their insight into what the ordination of women means for them.*

In 1995 I asked my vicar if I could train for lay ministry in the church. He said, “Why are you not thinking about being ordained?” I replied, “You know I’m divorced, a single mother – and a woman.”

Even though women had been ordained priest the year before, somehow it hadn’t occurred to me that the path they’d forged might be one I could walk, too. I’d also

assumed that my perceived failure in my marriage ruled out a priestly vocation. But the vicar pointed me to the director of ordinands, to start a journey of discernment.

I began to learn something I return to repeatedly – that I’m called to bring my whole self, including my imperfections, to my role as a priest, and to live out God’s grace in such a way that others can see that this grace is there for them, too.

*Ricarda works as a healthcare chaplain in an acute NHS Trust, with a particular interest in maternity. She loves cooking, hiking and spending time with her blended family.* 🍷

Today’s reading from Luke is also set in the wilderness, where Jesus has been “led by the Spirit”. This is wilderness as a place of challenges, but ultimately somewhere spiritually enriching. This Lent, can we learn the wisdom of the wilderness? Can we learn to live alongside others? And is there anything practical, however small, that we can do to alleviate the suffering of someone who’s yearning for a place to call home? 🍷

**Lord God, we hold before you all those who are in need of shelter and stability. This Lent, we pray for compassion and generosity to work for the glory of your kingdom, our one and only true home. Amen.**

## Books of the Old Testament

### Nahum

by Georgina Byrne

The book of Nahum is not an easy read. It is certainly short, with a breathless, rushing quality, but the subject matter and the violence of the language mean it’s seldom read aloud in church. The writer is Nahum, about whom we know only that he prophesied concerning the city of Nineveh. The jewel in the crown of the Assyrian Empire was about to be destroyed by God, and the whole empire would fall. By the

end of the seventh century BC the Babylonians were beginning to challenge the supremacy of the Assyrians, and Nineveh was indeed destroyed by 612 BC.

The real audience are the people of Judah, themselves humiliated and shamed by the Assyrians. The clue comes in 1:15, where the prophet assures them that they will never again be invaded and encourages them to celebrate their feasts. In the fierce anger directed at the Assyrians, the prophet is quietly assuring God’s people that salvation is near. 🍷

“Lent is a time of going very deeply into ourselves... What is it that stands between us and God? Between us and our brothers and sisters? Between us and life, the life of the Spirit? Whatever it is, let us relentlessly tear it out, without a moment’s hesitation.”

Catherine De Hueck Doherty (1896-1985), Catholic social activist