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Feb

## Mercy on the Wilderness Road

Renewed in Mercy

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT, YEAR A

The First Sunday in Lent invites us to consider how to set the space for the journey ahead.

### REFERENCES

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Psalm 32

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

### COLORS

Purple

Where is mercy in the wilderness? This is a driving question behind the first Sunday in Lent. Every year, we begin Lent by joining Jesus in the wilderness, witnessing the temptation, and examining what Jesus' temptation means for us. This year, we come to the wilderness afresh, ready to pay attention and encounter mercy at work in the midst of temptation, distress, and the help that comes along the way. As worship planners, this requires a delicate balancing act. We need to resist the urge to allegorize Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. It is not a tale of morality disconnected from reality. At the same time, our goal is not to overwhelm congregants with reminders of hardships and shame about past failings. We must find a way to tell the truth about our wilderness experiences that emphasizes God's persistent mercy that does not leave us alone in our frailty.

We encourage you to incorporate a prayer of confession throughout the season of Lent, but perhaps especially this first Sunday. Consider how you might approach confession anew as an act of trust in God's mercy and grace. We can tell the truth and be honest about our struggles and failings

because we know God—and through God, the body of Christ—empowers us to turn away from sin and toward life abundant.

This is also an excellent week to begin introducing a song to weave into worship throughout Lent. You might want to choose a Wesleyan standard like “Depth of Mercy” (*United Methodist Hymnal* 355) or “Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown” (*United Methodist Hymnal* 386). Or you might want to incorporate a more contemporary hymn like “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)” [*Worship & Song* 3104] or “Have Mercy on Me” (Porter’s Gate, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wMimZ\\_fU78](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wMimZ_fU78)). Consider how one of these hymns might be a musical companion through Lent by using it in different parts of worship or as a centering song before a regular part of worship, such as the prayer of confession, or as a response to the sermon.

The First Sunday in Lent invites us to consider how to set the space for the journey ahead. What natural elements represent wilderness in your context? What symbols draw your people into communal prayer and contemplation? What signs of mercy are meaningful in your community? Consider how these elements might make their way to the altar, the slides, the narthex or foyer, and throughout the worship space. Whether they set the space for this Sunday or for the whole season of Lent, these visual cues help prepare the congregation to enter into the journey ahead with intention and attention to mercy at work in your community.

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