

**WORDS OF HOPE FROM THE WILDERNESS
DURING THE FIFTH WEEK IN LENT**

from Rebeka Maples, COSSO Director of Spiritual Formation

And just like that it is the Fifth Week in Lent, and we are approaching Holy Week. This would be such an exciting time if we were in our usual routines, preparing for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Great Vigil and Easter!! Oh, how I love all those services, they are each so different, with different emotions and moods. I know many people don't attend some of them but that isn't why we go to all the trouble to walk people through the holiest of weeks and out of the wilderness into Easter. We do this for ourselves so we will understand once again the mystery of God. Some will prefer to stay in the wilderness, no matter what we do we cannot drag them out, but lo and behold, none of us will be stepping out of this Co-vid 19 wilderness any time soon.

I'm sure you've seen or heard some of the Christian messages that say this virus is God's will, as if God is some cosmic Puppeteer who makes bad things happen even to good people. In this line of thinking, everything is God's fault, i.e. God's will. Or maybe you are hearing messages that say God is punishing us, and the Great Magician will save us from the realities of life if we just pray enough and struggle through our pain and suffering, and when everything turns out the way we want then, well, God answers prayer.

And, of course, God does answer prayer but the answer may not be what we wanted. Just look at the lectionary story for today from John (11:1-45), when Jesus calls Lazarus from the tomb. What a strange story. I'm not sure I'll ever figure out what happened that day. Why didn't Jesus come sooner? How could a dead man get up and walk? The story is beyond my understanding and yet, I give thanks for a God who is beyond my understanding. I believe in the wonder of the gospel stories and what they tell me about an unbelievable God, not so I can blame everything on God or even expect God to solve all my problems, but because God is in the midst of all that happens. And I will continue to pray and ask others to pray for God to keep: helping scientists find vaccines and cures, holding weary doctors and nurses, guiding tired EMS workers, encouraging parents and children, maintaining order when no one can go to work, lifting the dying and healing the sick. Oh yes, I believe in a mysterious God, one who is as near as my breath, and I will keep praying for understanding.

And so, dear friends, do not lose heart, we will emerge from all of this with changed hearts, new insights, and a spiritual awareness that takes us beyond our understanding.

In the meantime, here are a few words from our COS Lenten Journal that we put together at the beginning of Winter term with a prayer, reminding us that God is always with us, by MaryAnn Rufener, one of our Winter term graduates.

I SEE GOD...

by MaryAnn Rufener, part-time LP, East Ohio

"No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us." 1 John 4:12

I experience God in many ways, but one special way is in cardinals. It seems that whenever I see a cardinal it is a time where I need the Lord. I am either reaching out to Him for a fresh touch of His Holy Spirit or I am asking Him to touch someone else. Often times I am driving and they swoop down in front of my car. But one time in particular I had just pulled into my driveway after my dad passing. A cardinal came and sat on my side mirror for 7 minutes. It was so close to me I could see every feather. I then felt God so very close to me. I see God in the cardinals.

Praise God that You allow us to see You in many different ways. I recognize Your presence in my life. May You continue to use countless ways to get my attention of Your constant love. Amen.

TAKE THIS CUP AWAY

by Rebeka Maples, PhD, COS Spiritual Director

Mark 14:36

"Abba, he said, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me, if that is what you wish for me."

I cannot take this cup away.
I cannot celebrate for you.

The joy that once was here has vanished,
as once it came.
The grief you feel is sorrow's way
and it too will disappear.

But for now,
I cannot take this cup away.
I cannot celebrate for you.
When you weep I will weep,
and as you wait I will wait.

For joy will return,
and grief will vanish
as once it came.

God of sorrow, hear our cries and the cries of your broken people...