

November 2016

Dear Friends in the Journey,

This past weekend, Todd Wynward from Taos, NM, was visiting Spiritus Christi. Todd recently wrote a book called Re-Wilding the Way: Breaking Free to Follow and Untamed God (Herald Press). I really liked the book and loved hearing Todd in person.

I had mentioned Todd in the September guidelines and am mentioning him again this month in more detail because I think he's onto something profound that we should consider as people of faith.

So for this month's guidelines, I'm gonna make 2 recommendations:

1) Go to <http://spirituschristi.org/#/media/listen-to-a-homily>

Click "Click here to listen to a homily" now and then click on Todd Wynward's homily from last weekend. It is an 18 minute audio.

2) Read Todd's piece from below. It is one of a four-part series that you can read more of at <http://www.taostilt.org/about-todd-wynward/tbow.html>

At the end, I provide a few questions for you to consider – for yourself and/or for your Small Christian Community.

Blessings,

Mike Boucher

[michaelcboucher@netscape.net](mailto:michaelcboucher@netscape.net)

### **You've Been Occupied**

toddwynward@gmail.com [Part 1 of 4 in Going Cimarron, a series on Wilderness Spirituality]

Try this on: Your native indigenous character as a child of God has been distorted by dominant culture.

If you're a privileged North American like me, your mental and spiritual environment has been colonized by the agents of Empire. You've been tamed and domesticated, shackled and stuffed. Despite your professed values of love and justice, you often make choices that are unfair, unjust, and unhealthy for the world. You hoard too much, spend too much, work too much, worry too much, consume too much, attack too much, protect too much, waste too much. You love too little, share too little, forgive too little, risk too little, enjoy too little. You've become devoted to gadgets and diversions.

You've become enslaved by the tempting addictions, frenetic compulsions, and enticing attachments of the modern affluent lifestyle. If you're like me, you've become addicted to Empire. Ours is not a new problem. For millennia, God's people have too easily devoted themselves to idols of gold, submitted to Caesar, bonded with Babylon, and assimilated into Empire.

Thankfully, our tradition offers an ancient solution to these addictions: transformation in wild places.

There is a voice calling: in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord. In the wilderness, make straight a roadway for our God --Isaiah 40:3

With these words, do you think Isaiah was just being metaphorical? Do you think the prophet was merely presenting poetic images of nature to his audience like we might present a pleasing slideshow in a downtown hotel? Hardly. He was giving instructions to a people enthralled by Babylon.

Seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah was diagnosing our malady and declaring that spending time in wild places—away from civilization—is a necessary crucible for adult spiritual development.

Matthew Colwell writes: *It is a recurring biblical theme that wilderness is where humans find liberation, identity, power, and life anew. Leaving domesticated space for the wild is the story of God's people and prophets from Abraham to Exodus, from Elijah to John the Baptist. Jesus began his ministry from the wilderness; for prayer, teaching and feeding, he consistently finds wild places uncolonized by religious and political powers. Defecting from imperial forms of captivity— whether Babylonian, Egyptian, or Roman—to reconnect with God is an underappreciated theme in scripture.*

God's people leaving domesticated space for the wild is a theme as old as Scripture itself. God's prophets gaining their strength in wild places uncolonized by Empire is a tradition much older than Jesus. Where was John the Baptist when Jesus came to find him?

Already out in the wilderness, says the Gospel of Mark. Already dwelling in a wild place, not depending upon Empire for shelter or food, security or identity, John encouraged thousands of city dwellers to leave civilization behind for a while and be transformed in undomesticated space.

Through the lens of recent archaeological findings, it seems the Baptizer was part of a much older wilderness tradition. Dr. James Tabor and colleagues uncovered a cavern complex near Suba, Israel they dub "The Cave of John the Baptist." The cave complex— remote from civilization—appears to have been used for water purification rituals, and the underground pools contain baptismal pottery artifacts dating back to the bronze age: 700 B.C., the time of Isaiah.

Was there a direct wilderness teaching passed down from the prophet Isaiah through John the Baptist through Jesus to his followers, a tradition we have lost today? It's not certain, but it's intriguing to think about. Whether formal or not, Judeo-Christianity has had a tradition of wilderness transformation for thousands of years. Why?

Because Empire-addicted people have always needed to go cimarron in order to become God's people. What does the term cimarron mean? In a fascinating book called *Goatwalking*, Jim Corbett writes that a cimarron is a slave or domesticated animal that goes free, something tame gone wild. The antonym of cimarron is *reducido* ['reduced'], used by the Spanish conquistadors as both adjective and noun to characterize and classify tamed Native Americans. To the wilderness one must go to become cimarron, unshackled by Empire.

Our tradition tells us that, in wild places, we become empty enough to become God's people. In the desert, we repent: we wake up, turn on, turn around, re-vitalize, and are remade by God. But what happens when we go cimarron? What happens when we go to the desert? What did Jesus find in the wilderness? What can we find? These, my friends, are questions for next time!

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. What catches your attention from Todd's talk or reading?
2. In the reading, does anything shock you? Why?
3. Have you ever thought of yourself as having been domesticated? What might it mean to be "wild" again?
4. Why would the church have become domesticated?
5. How might you experience "wild-er-ness" in your own context?