

*"In The Wilderness"*  
*Isaiah 40:1-8 Matthew 3:1-12*  
*December 9, 2007*

If you have not read the book, you can see the movie. Regardless, you have to love the title  
***"No Country for Old Men."***

Some critics call this movie, taken from the book by Cormac McCarthy, tense, haunting, terrifying. It's also a sad and melancholy movie, as was the book.

It is the story of a working class Vietnam veteran who lives in a trailer park and walks into the wilderness.

The prophet Isaiah cries out to us today:

***"In the wilderness prepare the way  
Of the Lord  
Make straight in the desert a  
Highway for our God."***

Isaiah is comforting and reassuring.

***"The grass withers, the flower fades,  
But the word of our God will stand  
Forever."***

I have been in the Wilderness a time or two, and I have known others who wandered off into the Wilderness. Words of comfort and assuredness are like water to a thirsty soul.

Literally, I was dropped off by a float plane a few years ago in the wilderness of Alaska, with only a bow and arrow and sleeping bag. The fun part was over about the time I waded ashore. The wilderness is not a friendly place, and "No Country for Old Men."

C.G. Jung once wrote;

***"There have always been people who, not satisfied with the dominants of conscious life, set forth into the wilderness where, like Jesus, they come up against the son of darkness."***

Isaiah's announcement of comfort to those in the Wilderness is the coming of God into their lives and nation.

Warfare is ended, sins are pardoned, highways are made straight, mountains are made low, uneven ground becomes level, and rough places are made smooth.

Today is the second Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Peace. For us to proclaim Peace on a day when wars are fought on many lands demands great faith in a God whose Word outlives times of peace and war, times of prosperity and depression.

We stand in that old line that reaches back to John the Baptist. His style of life, his way of speaking and his message were a conscious revival of the tradition of the old prophets, like Isaiah. John's message was a simple one – God was angry with his people and he planned to punish them, and it

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would be executed on earth by *‘the one who is to come’* with an axe and who will separate the chaff from the wheat.

A prophecy is not a prediction; it is a warning or a promise that is conditional.

In the last 50 years, since Dr. Spock and Mister Rogers, the ideal of conditional warning or promise has fallen out of favor in the US.

We now have about 80 million young workers, called “millennials,” born between 1980-95, who live in an unconditional world. Sociologists tell us that this group who were doted on by parents, told they were special, played little league with all winners, laden with trophies for just showing up are now in the work force, and will only take ‘yes’ for an answer. This is a \$50 Billion a year business for consultants who teach bosses how to talk to workers who demand ‘free food, fun and flexibility’ at work.

William Stafford in his poem *‘You Must Revise Your Life’* stated it clearly:

***“They want a wilderness with a map.”***

How do we offer the Word of God that calls for repentance, that separates the wheat from the chaff to young people and old people who only want to hear from a God of comfort?

My understanding of Scripture and my experience in the wilderness tells me that peace follows conflict, that salvation follows suffering, and that entitlement does not create identity.

God’s Word tells us what Theodor Adorno said in *Reading Lolita in Tehran:*

***“The highest form of morality is not to feel at home in one’s own home.”***

Like Jesus we must face the son of darkness, and bear up against the temptations of easy bread and quick power.

Like Jesus we will find Peace only by passing though the Wilderness.

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