

Labyrinth Wilderness Retreat

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The Labyrinth College Ministry of Austin, Texas carved out some time in our spring breaks for a backpacking retreat in the Hill Country. It was a journey that involved not knowing where we were going (except for the leaders). There was no road map or itinerary and when we registered it was with the understanding that no one could wear a watch, bring a cell phone, or even a book. Already we were outside of our comfort zones.

Jesus retreated in the wilderness before he started his ministry. It does not say that the Spirit drove him in a church van. The Greek ἐκβάλλει says he was cast out or thrown forcibly. While our entry was gentler the wilderness was calling and so we went.



The three themes around which this journey was organized were the ideas of:

- **Wilderness** - as a place of scarcity and vulnerability...a geographical place but also a season in which much of our lives are spent...
"Wilderness. The word itself is music." ~Edward Abbey, Desert Solitaire
- **God Speaks** - ancient Christian tradition tells us that God speaks through two books - the Bible and Nature.

"Some people, in order to discover God read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note

it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead he set before your eyes the things that he had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?" ~St. Augustine (354-430)

- **Labyrinth as Pilgrimage** - not a trip but an experience; an encounter with God to which we have each been uniquely called... A labyrinth is not a maze, designed for us to lose our way but a labyrinth is designed for us to find our way.

A canvas labyrinth had recently been purchased for this college ministry and had just arrived the week before. We took it with us. It was rainbow colored so as we removed our shoes and prepared to enter the labyrinth together, a reading from Genesis 9 was offered.

^{v13} *I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.*



This was our first taste of going out as a group on a retreat like this. We learned a lot; about each other, ourselves, our world, and our place in it as God's creation. We better understand the words of Wendell Berry when he says, *"The Bible is best read and understood outdoors, and the farther outdoors the better."*

The wilderness continues to call; and we will continue to go.

