

Church of the Woods

Have you ever noticed...

... that throughout the Gospels, whenever Jesus is portrayed as praying – which is frequently, suggesting it is important – the writers take pains to tell us that Jesus “went up the mountain by himself to pray” (Matthew 14:23)? Or, Jesus went to the wilderness. Or, Jesus went to a lonely place, by the sea, or to the garden.

It begins immediately after his baptism. In Mark’s version, upon being baptized in the river “the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness” (Mark 1:12). And the Transfiguration, of course, takes place atop the mountain (e.g. Matthew 17).



Mt. Jefferson, New Hampshire

Jesus’ life of prayer – his direct connection to his Abba, his Source – is outdoors, usually alone, in the wild places. Jesus goes to the temple to teach and to overturn but, at least according to the Gospel accounts, not to pray. For that, he goes to the Wilderness.

So I wonder, if direct experience of the Divine in nature was so central to Jesus, how come it is so peripheral to the church?

The answers to this seem relatively obvious – the church has shepherded people indoors where they can be properly taught, guided, sheltered, and ministered to. For better and for worse.

But what have we lost by abandoning the practice of prayer that was so central to Jesus, to the Psalmist, and to so many other Biblical figures? As we have lost our sense of the whole of Creation as an immediate route to encounter God, is it any wonder the Church has been so slow to cherish and conserve Nature?

How about creating a new form of church with this practice of prayer in the wilderness at the core? [A Church of the Woods?](#)

Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy! (Psalm 96:12)

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