Ransacking, as I do, a number of websites and books and articles as I prepare a sermon, I came across a poem I’ll share with you in a moment.

The author is the Rev. Jan Richardson, a Methodist pastor, artist, writer, and blogger. The poem is excerpted from her book *Circle of Grace;* her website is janrichardson.com.

Before sharing the poem with you, though, I’ll reiterate something I alluded to in Wednesday’s sermon: Life is filled with hills and valleys, dark places and light. All of us go into our own wildernesses at various points in our lives.

Richardson’s poem reminds us that just before Jesus is driven into the wilderness he has received baptism and a blessing from heaven, complete with booming heavenly voice. And last Sunday we read of the Transfiguration, that light-filled event that began, or was prelude to, Jesus’ leading his disciples to Jerusalem, to his passion and death. Perhaps that’s enough of a setup for Jan Richardson’s thoughtful poetic reflection.

**Beloved Is Where We Begin**

If you would enter
into the wilderness,
do not begin
without a blessing.

Do not leave
without hearing
who you are:
Beloved,
named by the One
who has traveled this path
before you.

Do not go
without letting it echo
in your ears,
and if you find
it is hard
to let it into your heart,
do not despair.
That is what
this journey is for.

I cannot promise
this blessing will free you
from danger,
from fear,
from hunger
or thirst,
from the scorching
of sun
or the fall
of the night.

But I can tell you
that on this path
there will be help.

I can tell you
that on this way
there will be rest.

I can tell you
that you will know
the strange graces
that come to our aid
only on a road
such as this,
that fly to meet us
bearing comfort
and strength,
that come alongside us
for no other cause
than to lean themselves
toward our ear
and with their
curious insistence
whisper our name:

Beloved.
Beloved.
Beloved.

 —Jan Richardson from [Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons](https://janrichardson.com/bookcircleofgrace) © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com.

Perhaps Jesus knew that his baptism, replete with parting heavens and divine voice was preparation for what lay ahead of him. I believe that he accepted the baptism and blessing as what was supposed to happen at that moment and then was as surprised as any of us would be, afterward, to find himself facing temptations and privations. And he accepted *that* experience as what was supposed to happen in *that* moment. And I believe that in the thick of those temptations he heard echoes of the heavenly voice, calling “Beloved, Beloved, Beloved.”

May we, in our own wilderness experience hear the same, because we, too, have been baptized—baptized into the Body of Christ, and we, too, by God’s grace, can hear that echo, knowing that it is our name as well: “Beloved, Beloved, Beloved.” + + +