Today we come to the end of our Lenten Preaching Series entitled “A Way Through the Wilderness” – based on Rob Renfroe’s book of the same title. We have been learning spiritual lessons about being in a wilderness, but there is a time when we come out of that wilderness. And to that experience we now turn as we wrap up this series. Remember, with God there is always a way through the wilderness and the promise of blessing.

God has a place of rest ready for us where we emerge from the struggles of the wilderness. There is a land of promise for us where we will experience the peace and the abundance of God’s blessings. God does not want us to stay in the wilderness forever. God’s desire is that we come out of the wilderness, step into God’s rest, and live in God’s promises.

Renfroe suggests three benefits of the wilderness that will serve us well as we emerge. First, he says that the wilderness will reveal your heart. When you or I come out of the wilderness, we should have a better understanding of who we are and where we are in our relationship with God. The flaws and the weaknesses we have discovered should get us off of “autopilot” and cause us to seek God more purposefully than ever. The strengths we have found within ourselves should cause us to face life with a humble confidence that we may not have known before.

When we have been through the worst that life can inflict on us and we have learned that through Christ we can “do all things,” we will find that we can face future challenges and hardships with a sense of peace and the assurance that God’s grace will be sufficient for us.

When you come through a wilderness, you will know what is in your heart, and that is information you have paid a high price to acquire. The goal now is to make the most of it as you step into rest that God has promised.

The second benefit of being in a wilderness, according to Renfroe, is that the wilderness will change you. It is in and through these wilderness experiences that God can make us into someone very different, someone more like Christ: more compassionate, more understanding of
others, more loving, and more willing to stand for justice and holiness in our lives. The most difficult days of our lives can be the times when we learn to trust God in a new way and to care more deeply for others who are suffering and needy.

We all go through the wilderness. And we come out of the wilderness different than when we entered. There’s no question about that. The only question is whether our pain and confusion in the wilderness will turn us away from God so that we leave the wilderness angry, bitter, and cynical; or whether we will turn to God and say: “I am lost; come find me. I am weak; give me strength. I am broken; put my life together so I become the person you want me to be.” If we choose the latter, we will leave the wilderness closer to God, stronger in our faith, and ready to be used to bring life and hope to others.

Finally, Renfroe reminds us that the wilderness will give you a gift to share. The wilderness will give you a gift to share if you will allow it to do so. It can make your heart tender to the suffering of others. It can fill your spirit with a depth of compassion you never would have known without your own time and experience of devastation. It can teach you that you don’t have to be the answer; you just have to be present with another person in his or her wilderness.

As we leave our own wilderness, we need to look for others who are there now. There is no greater gift we can give, no greater comfort we can provide than truly being with someone who is hurting. And there is no better place to learn the lessons of compassion than in the wilderness of our own suffering.

Whatever it may be, the wilderness in your life will end. You will come out. As the author of Hebrews tells us, the promise of entering God’s rest still stands. There is a place of peace and a time of joy waiting for you. God has promised it to you. My prayer is that when you leave the wilderness, you’ll be able to say, “I wouldn’t go through that again for a million dollars, but I wouldn’t take all that there is in the world for what I learned about walking with God.”

We will never be the same person when we leave the wilderness, and that can be an incredible gift. There is a way to go through the wilderness that will transform our lives in the most wonderful ways, leaving us closer to God, more like God’s Son, Jesus, stronger in our faith, and more equipped to be a blessing to others who are in the wilderness. It will not be
easy. But it will be worth it. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.