

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS THE CHURCH DOING OUT IN THE WOODS ?

Christianity is an outdoor faith.

It has roots in shepherds' fields, heavenly hosts,
a manger with animals, adoring parents, friends and
visitors from near and far bearing gifts of great significance.

Christianity shares roots in the Jewish concept of creation
which begins with waters swirled by the Spirit of God.

The sun, moon, and stars of light are in the beginning.

There are hills and valleys, streams and lakesides.

There are animals in the air, in the water and on the land,
with all kinds of plants bearing food.

Out of the dust of stars and planets, the Hand of God formed
children of the earth and sky and gave them charge over it all.

With all due respect, the patriarchs were outdoor people:

Abram was an early backpacker; with flocks and family,

Joseph's primary contribution was in agriculture, and

Moses led his campers from one challenge to another
seeking survival and the will of God.

They welcomed any and every person to join their search
so long as they searched for God.

If this earthy picture has started a ping-pong list of "yes buts" in defense
of people who would rather camp in nice hotels and hike the city streets,
it must be pointed out that wanting things OUR way began with the very
first people of God. It is a human trait. While we did get into trouble
in that first garden, we got out of trouble years later in another garden.

It was foreshadowed in the Old Testament by a son
who took a trusting hike with his father
to the top of a mountain to make a sacrifice.

In the New Testament, the second garden was also outside city gates.

What happened there ultimately engaged all of nature
and shook the very earth on which we stand.

Between those garden times, the people of God, and Jesus with his disciples
lived very close to the earth and ministered to people who were being saved
..... and Heaven holds our HOPE.

Survival and salvation are more closely related
when we depend on earth-to-mouth subsistence--as we do
on the farm, in the garden, on the waters, or along the trails
when sun-warmed fruit and berries present themselves for sweet enjoyment

In this abundant land of ours, it is hard to IMAGINE what it is like
to scrounge the earth to stay alive.

In barren lands UNLIKE ours, people cannot imagine our abundance.

It is mostly in ABUNDANT lands where churches will do best to open
at least one of their doors to the wonders of God's good green earth,
lest we forget where life and love and light really do come from.

It helps us to remember how springtime and harvest, forgiveness and
recovery, bad times and good, appreciation and praise, thanksgiving
and the very Glory of God--all, abundantly do feed the hungry bodies
and the empty souls of all God's children.

It is healing and inspiring to see ourselves "all in this adventure together",
telling stories, singing songs, discovering each other in the out of doors
and wondering at the marvelous way God REALLY wants our lives to be.