

WILDERNESS, NUNS, AND HEARING GOD

by **Jeremy Miller**

The wild is actually quite tame the way most of us experience it. Stunning landscapes decorating the background of our computer screens. The occasional hike on a well-groomed trail or weekend stay at a cozy little campground. In this wild, the phone attached to your being tells you and the kids that the next geocache is located just off the trail to the left. It lets you know rain is expected tomorrow afternoon at 3 pm and that the North Koreans detonated another bomb. This wild is like the family golden retriever, thumping tail, prancing feet, anxious tongue, looking for you to toss his slobber soaked ball and pat his head. There is another kind of wild. Demanding respect, it does not suffer fools and will not be cuddled, but it can be loved. It was this last brand of wild that my brother and I beheld for nearly a week. The phone through which nearly all of my life is funneled was powerless to inform or remind me of anything. Regular obligations, pastoral goals, and nearly all relationships were postponed while we navigated untamed mountain wildernesses. It was majestic and fresh and freeing.

When one is stripped of duty and distraction, there is more room to think and pray and wonder. This kind of silence and space sounds romantically energizing to me, but the truth is that extended time with our thoughts is often terrifying. So it was with me on this particular trip. In the comfort of normal routine, I might struggle with doubts, but I could wake up and know the day was full. I did not have time to wrestle with such things. In this wilderness I was unable to wake up and be rid of questions peppering the rainfly of my mind. What created more fear was that the questions were basic and raw. I found myself asking, "God, did you call me to pastoring? If so, what am I not doing correctly? Are you finished with me, God?" And, finally, "If you do want me pastoring, how do I do it?" Maybe it's the fact that several families have chosen to worship elsewhere recently that gave me pause. Perhaps, it's realizing that not all of your dreams for God's people fit God's timetable. It did seem that the ruggedness of the landscape made it feel safer to ask difficult questions. A God who created this was fearless enough to give me the truth.

He didn't say anything....at least, not that I was willing to acknowledge. (He spoke through my brother, but I wasn't paying attention at the time.)

The questions persisted as I journeyed out of the wilderness on Highway 287 toward Fort Collins. Through a clearing in my fog of thought I noticed a sign off the highway, "Abbey of St. Walburga." As I passed it, it occurred to me that the abbey might be a good place to pray. A quick u-turn and expedition down a little dirt road brought a beautiful abbey into view. It was striking and rustic like the hills it was nestled in. The entrance was inviting, and after a quick walk

down a wide hallway, I slipped into the quiet chapel. "There are a lot of nuns here," I thought to myself as I slid into a pew. It was quiet. The nuns prayed and I prayed. Suddenly one of them appeared next to me offering me a program. It dawned on me that this was probably a convent and that they were in the midst of a service and that I had interrupted their worship. Slightly embarrassed, I thought about leaving but decided that exiting now would cause more commotion and, worse yet, belittle their hospitality. So I stayed.

They chanted and sang and prayed. Then one of the nuns stood and read this, "...but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Tim. 4:12-16 ESV)

With gratitude, I looked up through the pine beams to the dome of the abbey chapel. A word from the Lord, thanks be to God.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Conservative Mennonite Conference

Irwin, OH

Pastors' Conference

February 19-22, 2018
Belleville, Pennsylvania

Annual Conference 2018

July 19-22, 2018
Montgomery, Indiana

Rosedale Bible College

Irwin, Ohio

Fall Semester

Semester ends, Dec. 15, 2017

Winter Term

Classes begins, Jan. 8, 2018
Semester ends, Feb. 15, 2018

Spring Semester

Classes begins, Feb. 27, 2018
Semester ends, May 25, 2018
Commencement, May 26, 2018

MENNONITE

YOUTH CHOIR FESTIVAL

MARCH 10-11, 2018

WHO Participants who love to sing
—grades 3 through 9.

WHERE Sauder Concert Hall in
Goshen, Indiana.

DIRECTOR Dr. Ardis R. Faber,
Conductor

COST \$40 per participant

mennoniteyouthchoir.com

