

Wilderness Retreat Reflection by Nick Pohlenz

The morning alarm rang in the late, darkness of the night. Each of us arose around 3:00 am to begin our journey together: a retreat into the wilderness. A time of solitude paired with community, a space of silence matched with fellowship and laughter. Like our monastic brothers before us, we embarked together as a body in Christ fleeing the world, as we knew it to rekindle our life with God.

I joined EFC-MAYM's Wilderness Retreat in Wyoming realizing how the lasting practices of the monastic tradition still have a great value for us today. This year's trip was an adventure in both unexpected detours and surprising provision and rest. Having to change the locale of our retreat the morning we arrived at the trailhead, we soon realized how necessary God's presence and provision would be during our time from day one. At which point I realized the truth in the old adage our guide Lauren repeated throughout the trip: *Sometimes we have to be pushed to our very edge for there to be room for God to work in us and speak in us.*

God's provision from the first day couldn't have been any clearer. Relocating our retreat from the Brooklyn Lake trailhead to the Encampment River Wilderness area (about 70 miles southwest of the prior) was a huge relief physically. We dropped about 2,000 ft worth of elevation, which is a big deal when it comes to breathing and overall endurance for both the llamas and us. Instead of icy cold nights we were blessed with sunny, warm afternoons and a great lack of mosquitoes typical of the Brooklyn Lake and Medicine Bow Peak area. The trail through the river valley proved to have the perfect intervals of campsites when we needed to stop, which is another big deal because no one on this trip had ever been on this trail before. We had entered a mysterious land where only God knew and only God could provide as we continued onward.

Each day's structure was varied greatly because of the change of plans the first day. Our leaders, the fearless "'Louis" and Clark' duo of Lauren and Jesse, handled the flexibility with both intentionality and willingness to go with the flow of God's plans for our week. I was really encouraged to watch both of them trust in how the Spirit was leading with the complete lack of familiarity in locale and time frame. Overall, I felt the greatest take away I had from the trip was observing Lauren's excellent example as a servant leader and Jesse's humble strength as a spiritual mentor in both the serious and hilarious times throughout the trip.

There is no experience of God's presence as concrete as when we leave the familiar, civilized world we have grown accustomed to and head out into the deserted, quiet spaces of creation. Without the modernized distractions and routines we normally structure our lives around, we become wholly dependent on His provision and presence for our direction. What we realize is just how close God is when there is little of anything we know around us, and when we return to our world, His presence within those familiar spaces perseveres evermore. Sometimes all we have to do to reinvigorate our spiritual life is run away (have solitude) and shut up (be silent, like our monastic brothers before us) so we may return to thrive in the world in a continued sense of God's presence we found

in the woods.