

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

March 13



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Isaiah 43: 16-21

Thus says the Lord,
 who makes a way in the sea,
 a path in the mighty waters,
who brings out chariot and horse,
 army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
 they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
Do not remember the former things,
 or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
 now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
 and rivers in the desert.
The wild animals will honour me,
 the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
 rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
 the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

REFLECT

In the desert we slowly start to see differently.

It is as though we have been wandering around with thick cataracts in both eyes and now they have been removed and we can see what is really there.

It is hard to describe this sort of seeing.

Isaiah gives it a good go.

It is something like the defeat of an entire Egyptian army being as easy as snuffing out a candle.

It is something like an impassable sea becoming a road.

It is something like finding a fast moving deep stream where hours before there was a bone dry ditch.

It is something like a desert full of bright flowers after rain (Isaiah 35:1).

It is hard to describe because it is a new thing.

It isn't deducible from the old, from where we used to stand, from what we used to know.

We couldn't have thought our way into this.

It isn't a grand new logically impregnable system for understanding everything.

And thus these desert people, when they talk at all (many of them are silent types), lapse into story and metaphor and poetry and analogy.

And so it appears to those busy folk back in crowded in Egypt that these wild stories of tracks and streams and flowers are merely the desert mirages of someone who is surely slowly dying of thirst.

The elders of Israel came out of Egypt and into the desert where they *saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness* (Exodus 24:10).

If what God wants to show us is something like a sapphire footpath in the wilderness and we are in Egypt asking him to resolve a doctrinal dilemma or to advance our career, then something may need to shift.

Probably us.

SAYINGS

“Launch into the deep,” says Jacques Ellul, “and you shall see”. The secret of seeing is, then, the pearl of great price. If I thought he could teach me to find it and keep it forever I would stagger barefoot across a hundred deserts after any lunatic at all. But although the pearl may be found, it may not be sought. The literature of illumination reveals this above all: although it comes to those who wait for it, it is always, even to the most practiced and adept, a gift and a total surprise.

Annie Dillard
Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

Though I came to forget or regret all I have ever done, yet I would remember that once I saw the dragons aloft on the wind at sunset above the western isles; and I would be content.

Ursula K. LeGuin
The Farthest Shore

In this part of the world you have to circle into truth through stories.

John Paul Lederach
The Moral Imagination

The Western Desert art movement is one of the marvels found in our deserts.

http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/papunya_painting/works_on_show

<http://papunyatula.com.au/artworks/>

PRAY

Reason can testify only inadequately to things of which it has no experience. The brilliance of this vision is like that of infused light or of a sun covered with some material of the transparency of a diamond, if such a thing could be woven.

Teresa of Avila
Interior Castle

Take your favourite ‘I wish it were true but it is a bit hard to believe’ metaphor or story about the things of God and sit with it for a while today.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

What would you like to be true but you can’t quite believe about God?

Have you seen strange and remarkable things that mean a lot to you?

