

## Out to the Desert

The dry, hot, arid, and seemingly devoid of life environment of the desert or wilderness features prominently in Scripture. It was in the desert that the Angel of God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and inflamed his call to mission. Many of the Hebrew Prophets were drawn into these barren lands to hear the Word of God. Jesus, immediately after his baptism, was driven into the wilderness to prepare for his ministry.

This wasteland, paradoxically, becomes the locus of divine intervention and presence. In these dust bowls Hagar and Ishmael experience deliverance from death (Genesis 21), Elijah hears the still, small voice of God (1 Kings 19), and the Israelites march on to the Promised Land led by pillars of cloud and fire (Exodus 13:21-22).



The moral of the desert soon becomes apparent: God does not abandon people to their despair in these badlands. Rather in this nothingness, people and landscapes are transformed. Burning sands become pools of bubbling springs (Isaiah 35:7) and the human person—refined like silver—emerges into a place of abundance (Ps 66:10-12).

### Isaiah 35: 1-6a, 10

The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom.  
They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song.  
The glory of Lebanon will be given to them, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;  
they will see the glory of YHWH, the splendor of our God.

Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak,  
say to those whose hearts are fearful: Be strong, fear not!  
Here is your God, who comes with vindication;  
With divine recompense, God comes to save you.

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared;  
then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing.

Those whom YHWH has ransomed will return  
and enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy;  
they will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee.

### FOR REFLECTION

1. Isaiah prophesies the future restoration of Israel in terms evoking the original Exodus: a path through the wilderness leads to a return to the land. Share an experience where

you, as an LGBTQ person or ally, felt spiritually or physically exiled. How did God lead you through this desert? Have you entered your "Promised Land" or are you still waiting on the promises of God to be fulfilled in you?

2. The historical context of the reading is the affliction of the tribe of Judah which had been exiled from its Temple, land, and ruler. The tribe's suffering is described as feeble hands and weak knees, a fearful heart, obscured vision, hindered hearing, broken bodies and silent tongues. Isaiah's description of a human body overwhelmed with despair and weariness draws the reader into an exile's fatigue. In your own life experience as an LGBTQ person or ally, how does your body react to social or ecclesial exiles? Do you feel silenced, broken, or worn out? Where do you find healing, hope and rejuvenation?
3. Isaiah 35 invites us to reflect on Advent not only as God's coming in Christ, but also as our coming home. *We leap and shout and sing; we gather with joy and gladness and together we walk home.* As an LGBTQ person or ally, what is "home" for you? If "home" is still an elusive concept, how and where do you find dwelling and rest?
4. "Those whom YHWH has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy." Where did you last experience pure joy? What circumstances in your life as an LGBTQ person or ally led to this point?
5. "Here is your God who comes to save you with vindication and divine recompense." Pope Francis ushered in a new era of LGBTQ inclusion with his famous question, "Who am I to judge?" As the Pope continues to open doors of the Catholic Church to the LGBTQ/ally community, especially through the synodal process, how do you imagine God's recompense? Where do you see abundant flowers blooming?

## PRAYER

### Psalm 146: 6-10

YHWH, you keep faith forever;  
You secure justice for the oppressed;  
You give food to the hungry;  
You set captives free.

You give sight to the blind;  
You raise up those who were bowed down;  
You love those who are just.

You protect strangers;  
You sustain orphans and the bereaved -  
but you thwart the way of the wicked.

YHWH will reign forever -  
your God, O Zion, through all generations.

Alleluia!

