

Dear Friends:

I heard a cute story the other day. A mother camel and her baby are having a conversation. The baby asks *“Mom, why do we have these huge three toed feet?”* The mother replies, *“To enable us to trek across the desert without sinking.”* The baby camel asks, *“And why have we got these long, heavy eyelashes?”* *“To keep the sand out of our eyes on the trips through the desert ”* replies the mother camel. *“And Mom, why have we got these big humps on our backs?”* The mother, now a little impatient with the boy replies, *“They are there to help us store fat for our long treks across the desert, so we can go without water for long periods.”* *“OK, I get it!”* says the baby camel, *“We have huge feet to stop us sinking, long eyelashes to keep the sand from our eyes and humps to store water. Then, Mom, why the heck are we here in the Toronto zoo?”* Modern life sometimes makes one feel like a camel in a zoo. And like camels in a zoo we need sometimes to go into the desert in order to discover who we truly are. Lent invites us to enter into this kind of desert experience.

The desert was the birthplace of the first covenant. The Hebrew people who escaped from Egypt as scattered tribes arrived the Promised Land as one nation under God. It was in the desert that they were forged into the people of God by covenant. In the course of their history when their love and faithfulness to God grew cold, the prophets would suggest their return to the desert to rediscover their identity, their vocation and their mission in order to reawaken their faith and strengthen their relationship with God. The great prophets Elijah and John the Baptist adopted the desert lifestyle: they lived in the desert, ate desert food and adopted a simple desert lifestyle. One commentary says that *“The desert, or wilderness, is the university where God teaches His people”*.

And so our Church gives us this season of Lent. Of course we are not asked to go out and hop on a camel and head off for the desert! But we can all create a desert space in our overcrowded lives. We can set aside a place and time to be alone daily with God, a time to distance ourselves from the many noises and voices that bombard our lives every day, a time to hear God’s word, a time to rediscover who we are before God, a time to recognize God’s purposes and God’s way for our lives as Jesus did. And then, when the forty days have passed and we step out of the shadows and into the bright light of Easter – we will truly be able to celebrate and receive with joy God’s greatest gift of love and new life that is so freely given in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev. Elizabeth +