

5th Sunday in Lent – “for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” [Jeremiah 31:34]

Lent is a time for deepening our relationship with God; to explore more fully the nature and purposes of our God. The desert is a place of stark emptiness; devoid of the trappings and distractions of more familiar environments. Therein lies the challenge of whether our routines of worship, prayer and activity have themselves become such trappings. To what degree are our perceptions of God constrained by the language and priorities we choose, leaving us blind to other aspects of his being?

Jeremiah offered an invitation to a people who knew about God to re-discover their covenant relationship and know God for themselves.

You call us to be still – and in stillness know you more
In the empty wilderness, there is no figure but yours
No-one else on whom we can fix our attention,
Nothing with which to busy ourselves, except your waiting presence.

Throne rooms and palaces are easy to prefer;
Where the comforting distractions of frenzied activity,
And the noise and clamour of well-intentioned adoration,
Help us avoid the searing questions of your Kingdom's cause

And on our very doorsteps are many desert places
Landscapes scarred by neglect and deprivation
Lives parched and wearied by emptiness and longing
Not as passing pilgrims but imprisoned by a climate that is cruel and unforgiving.

Dare we believe that if we stand in that desert
Allow ourselves to be buffeted and scorched by its harsh extremes
That there we might not only find you
But see you in new light and discover more of who you are

For the God who has become one with us
Chooses not to invite us to any palatial banquet
Until we have walked with him in desert places
Taking up our cross to follow in the pathways of self-denial.

So let our light shine in the places that others might avoid
Let beacons of hope be kindled in places of despair
May we not simply wait for desert dwellers to join our self-styled party
But seek in their stories, new glimpses of who you are.