

AUDIO RETREAT

Lenten Landscapes 2023 | Week One | Egypt

Lenten Landscapes

Through the season of Lent, we are invited to enter with imagination into significant places within the story of the people of God: Egypt, the wilderness, the mountain of God, the river Jordan and the Promised Land. How might the features of these places speak to our own encounter with God? Where are our own 'holy places', past or present? What landscape are you now passing through on your journey with God?

Some resources for prayer and reflection

Week 1: Egypt

Egypt once the place of salvation for the Israelites in a time of famine, had become a place of oppression. A new Pharaoh, anxious to subjugate this growing number of incomers and seeing in them a ready and expendable workforce, set taskmasters over them to work as slaves in building sites and fields. Seemingly endless days, labouring under a hot sun. Driven, unfree, fearful and exhausted.

For us, the sources of our own Egypt may be internal rather than external: those attitudes, ways of seeing ourselves, or anxieties that confine us.

- Where are you unfree?
- What drives you incessantly?
- What fears narrow down your existence?
- Who or what are your taskmasters?

Then the Lord God said.

'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt;

I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters.

Indeed, I know their sufferings,

and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians,

and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land,

a land flowing with milk and honey'. [Exodus 3.7-8]

Take in these words about the stance of God to our unfreedom...

- seeing our misery
- hearing our cry
- knowing our suffering
- coming down to deliver us from oppressors
- bringing us out to a good and broad land

We don't wholly understand the roots of our unfreedom, let alone how to find this good and broad land of our liberty. Yet God sees, hears and knows our struggles and desires to lead us to where we can flourish. As Lent begins, open heart and mind to God's invitation to you – God's hope for you. How might this journey with God begin?

Some words for Lent

Discipline:

This may ring uneasily in our ears. 'Discipline' has become another word for punishment. For some of us a personal commitment to do something regularly may *feel* like punishment – we like to go with the moment and adapt to circumstances. But discipline is linked with being a disciple – the purposeful and intentional following of Christ. If we want to learn to cook, we need to commit to time spent cooking. It is the desire to learn and grow that moves us, not some external imposition. Yet, sometimes we won't feel that desire – and that's when we need a previously made decision to hold us in our intent.

- What are your deepest desires?
- What direction takes you towards meeting these desires?
- How might discipline help you travel in this direction?

Practices:

Practices are things we do [rather than intend to carry out]. The term also suggests we may need to grow into them...they take practise to begin to feel comfortable with them and to integrate them into our lives.

If you begin keeping a spiritual journal, it may take time and experiment before knowing how to make best use of it.

If you begin afresh the practice of the Examen it may take practice to settle into allowing God to remind you of what you noticed or what moved you in your day, rather than treating it as an exam where everything rests on you

- Is there a particular practice you are drawn to take up this Lent?



Repentance

Repentance is more than avoidance of sin – in the narrow way we tend to use the word 'sin'. Repentance is a change of direction – a turning **from** and a turning **to**. In this way, it is not only about stopping doing something that lacks life, it is also beginning a counter movement towards where you sense life lies.

Listen to God...Listen to your experience...Listen to your inner self.

- What do you desire to turn from?
- What do you desire to turn to?
- How will this movement be expressed?