

## AUDIO RETREAT

# Lenten Landscapes 2023 Week Five | The Promised Land

*I have seen the misery of my people...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]*

On the one hand, the Promised Land is a physical place, only reached by the conscious decision to leave where you are and to step out in response to the longing inside you: changing your work, ending or beginning relationships, moving home or even homeland, assessing and reshaping your priorities, daring to defy your fears and go for it – whatever the 'it' might be.

On the other, the Promised Land is the relationship with God that deepens through this journeying – and here again is a choice: to lean into this relationship. For not only do we not know in full what it is we are seeking, we also do not know the way.

### **Listen to your longing**

*As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, my God [Psalm 42.1]*



Often our longing has different layers. On the surface we long for the resolution of our immediate needs and wants. Often these are shaped by 'getting back to normal', whatever the normal is for each of us, or the removal of whatever disturbs us in the moment. There may be deeper areas of longing we are less in touch with. It may be these springs of longing are themselves disturbing, so we are less inclined to listen to them. Yet in these depths the Holy Spirit stirs in our spirit.

Ask God to help you befriend and understand your longing. Your longing may present itself at first in a form you do not feel inclined to welcome: restlessness, loss or frustration...

Perhaps your longing emerges in another way: in a surge of energy as you undertake an unfamiliar task, read lines in a book or contemplate exploring a new direction.

Rather than dismiss these experiences, ask God to help you receive them, allowing them to unfold, and, in time, reveal to you how they speak of the life you long for.

## Lenten landscapes

There is a day  
when the road neither  
comes nor goes, and the way  
is not a way but a place.  
*[Wendell Berry]*



Over these weeks we have explored our relationship with biblical landscape: Egypt – the place of affliction, the wilderness, the mountain, the river and the Promised Land. Landscape is more than a symbol or metaphor; physical places invite us into relationship with them. Artists or photographers reflect what they see and how it moves them. Walk through, or sit within a particular place and we find our mood changing. Senses wake, and thoughts rearrange as we become present to place. Jacob woke to find the place where he slept was also the house of God:

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said,  
'Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it! How awesome is this place!  
This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven.'  
*[Genesis 28.16-17]*

Whether you live in city or countryside, here are some ways to develop a more contemplative openness to your local landscape

- *Walk*: Develop a daily walking route – one you can complete without undue rushing. Notice what changes day by day.
- *Stop*: Build some regular pause points into your walk: a bench in a local park, a tree with a characteristic shape, a pond or a riverbank, a place of open sky. Be present for some moments to what is present to you there.
- *Sit*: Find somewhere that invites you to sit and be for a while
- *Draw*: Sketch something that draws you attention. It might be something that on other days you would think of as quite ordinary; but as you lose yourself in the act of drawing, more is revealed. Perhaps you want to draw something every day – however simple and quick your sketch is.
- *Take a photo*: Taking a photo can be a way of noticing the wonder of ordinary things.

When we begin to be more present to place and all it holds, we also become more open to God who meets us in that place