



Ambassadors of a **WORLDWIDE BROTHERHOOD**

MEDITATION 4: PAVE THE ROAD

The fourth stop shows us that walking with God is not always the most convenient way. Sometimes you feel like walking in the desert. The people in exile were summoned to take this road through the desert. How can we connect with those people who want to pave that road into a way for God? And what have vocation, commitment and compassion given us to actually go this way?

- **Lectio: TROUGH THE DESERT (FROM ISAIAH 40)**

Comfort you, comfort you my people, says your God. Speak comfortably to Jerusalem; and cry to her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received of Yahweh's hand double for all her sins.

The voice of one who cries, Prepare you in the wilderness the way of Yahweh; make level in the desert a highway for our God.

The voice of one saying, Cry. One said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the glory of it is as the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of Yahweh blows on it; surely the people is grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God shall stand forever.

You who tell good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain; you who tell good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with strength; lift it up, don't be afraid; say to the cities of Judah, Behold, your God!

To whom then will you liken God? or what likeness will you compare to him?

The image, a workman has cast *it*, and the goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts *for it* silver chains.

Have you not known? have yet not heard? has it not been told you from the beginning? have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

To whom then will you liken me, that I should be equal *to him*? says the Holy One.

Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these.

Why say you, Jacob, and speak, Israel, My way is hid from Yahweh, and the justice *due* to me is passed away from my God?

Have you not known? have you not heard?

The everlasting God, Yahweh, the Creator of the ends of the earth, doesn't faint, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding.

He gives power to the faint; and to him who has no might he increases strength.

Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

but those who wait for Yahweh shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.

- **Meditatio**

Isaiah is one of the great prophets of Israel. He announces the fall of Jerusalem. He also gives hope, by predicting the return to the city. Probably this text is from deuterio-Isaiah, who has sought connection with its predecessor. He says it's time to go back to Jerusalem. Babylon will fall, and the new ruler will allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem. This new beginning has some notable elements.

First, the author reports that the punishment is over: the time of exile that Israel suffered because she had turned away from her God, YHWH. Its leaders did wrong and acted mercilessly. The people engaged in idolatry. But now the pain is over. God turns back to his people. He calls someone to make this delight message known. Now they need to go through the desert again.

Much of Scripture is set in the desert. This also applies to the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. This can be understood literally, since they went from Babylon (modern Iraq) to Jerusalem (Israel). In the desert, it is not easy to obtain food, or to live there anyway. There is a lack of water. The exiles are invited to go the desert road and pave this road as a way to God. The desert can be a place to hide, and a place of purification.

But who is this God? This is the question the prophet gets from his people. God himself answers. Look at the creation. He is the Redeemer from injustice and oppression.

But, does God know me?, is another question. There is a clear confirmation. Although we might not know God so well; He knows us well. He gives us the energy to live, and to keep on going.

But the people feel like withering grass. The answer is: those who have hope in Yahweh will renew their strength. It is no coincidence that the name YHWH returns so often in this chapter. He is not just a god. The people may hope for YHWH, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Redeemer from slavery and exile.

We now read the text again

- **Contemplatio**

After each part we will be silent for a moment. At the end there is a silence of 10 minutes, ending with instrumental music

1. We all know the feeling of loneliness. Many people are walking around bewildered. What should I do with my life? Is there anyone who frees me from my futility? Who can give hope to my misery? The experience of abandonment can make us hopeless. And whoever meets such people, knows that it is not easy to speak about hope. About solidarity, about staying together, about ... Providing an answer about God is certainly difficult. God is not obvious. What tools do you have to speak of God?
2. The desert can be experienced literally: the heat, being alone, hungry and thirsty, endless roads. But the desert is also a spiritual journey. The desert can be the experience that God is not near: you feel that God does not know you. There is a crisis of faith in your life. Then the desert can be a road of purification. What is really important in your life? What desires do you have, when talking about God? Which of your desires should not be desired? And which do? Especially in desert, God confronts us, because all the fuss and noise is gone. Especially in the desert sounds only God's Voice, and no other. The desert can be a learning model to find faith. Just when you feel alone and abandoned, there is room for God to be experienced. In the silence and the emptiness is more room for God than in the hustle and bustle.
3. God calls someone, often a singular person. We saw that in the story of Abraham. God is known in this world by his creation, but especially by his creatures, and by man in particular. Each person is called by God, to show through life, learning and acting, who and what God is. In difficult situations he calls people to show a road, away from the suffering or distress.
4. Knowing God personally might be a difficult road. It has become harder these days to invoke God. Many people are looking seriously at the meaning of their existence, but they cannot believe in a god who loves them personally. Faith is a risk, the risk of trust. To dare this risk, we have to use all our powers: heart, mind, soul and talent.
5. Knowing God's way seems to be an impossible task. God's ways are often unfathomable. They are incomprehensible to us. More important is to build a personal relationship with God. How can we do this, even if we understand little of the gospel? You can feed hope, by bringing the Word of God into practice. You can deepen the relationship with God if you are committed to Gospel values.
6. God knows you and He gives you strength. God dwells in us through the Spirit. If we trust in Him, God gives us the strength to make life better. Thus, we become hospitable, and we open ourselves to the people around us. We can even become God's own voice and hands.

- **Collatio (sharing)**

1. What task did you give yourself last time? What did you do with it?
2. What kind of desert experiences did you have in your life?

3. How does this apply for the Church in your country?
4. God calls someone. Especially in times of despair and hopelessness. Do you dare raising your voice? Dare you to witness your faith in a new future? And if so, how?
5. How do you build your personal relationship with God?

- **Oratio (bidden)**

We pray to God. God never directly answers, but he does answer us by other people. Did you experience God has called you in others? Or did you experience that you got a response to a request you had, through others? How do you give that back to God?

God calls us to be liberating people. What do we respond to God?

- **Creatio (creative assignment)**

We invite you to write your own psalm, with the *desert* as a theme. For inspiration you can first read some Psalms, eg Psalm 126. Please share your text with other ambassadors on the facebook page!

Psalm 126, *A Song of Ascents*.

When Yahweh brought back those who
returned to Zion,
We were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing.
Then they said among the nations,
“Yahweh has done great things for them.”
Yahweh has done great things for us,
And we are glad.

Restore our fortunes again, Yahweh,
Like the streams in the Negev.
Those who sow in tears will reap in joy.
He who goes out weeping, carrying seed for
sowing,
Will assuredly come again with joy, carrying
his sheaves.

- **Operatio**

Suffering is the largest wilderness experience that can happen to a man or woman. Sometimes there may be hopeless suffering, a suffering that leads to loneliness and desolation. The Book of Job articulates this strongly. Read the complaint of Job in chapter 31, and read God's answer in chapter 38 -40 of that book.

What can *you* do, with what you've discovered in meditation and in the conversations with others you have had today?

The outcome of your plan will be discussed in the sharing of the next meeting.