

## **Donnybrook**

5 December 2021

### **Welcome**

The readings today mentioned the wilderness, desert. We've all seen photos and perhaps you have also experienced the desert. For us coming from Ireland, the desert makes a big impression – beautiful, wide and wild.

### **Topic**

Once I spent a week camping in a desert – it made a lasting impression.

### **Steps**

If you can move in your head to Israel and picture a map of country. South of Jerusalem, there is a very large triangle of land, down as far as the Red Sea, called the Negev. The word Negev means simply dry. There are towns there such as Beersheba but mostly there's nothing except the Bedouin. The trip I was on lasted a week and the purpose for the trip was to get to know archaeological and geological sites. In the Negev, for example, there is a huge canyon, very beautiful, called the Makhtesh-haGadol. It is slightly larger than the Grand Canyon.

It was in the month of October, so we slept in the open air, without tents, on the ground. I had no camping mattress so that was bit hard, with just a sleeping bag! When it was over, it was great to get back to Jerusalem to my own bed. We were really camping, so we bought and cooked our own food. There was a young French couple, Jacques-Hervé and Elisabeth, who took over all the food prep, so with all the limitations, we ate kind of well.

Apart from the ancient sites, nature is wonderful in the Negev. You do have springs of water; we saw ibexes (desert goats); geological sites such as the canyon. One deep experience was the night sky. There is no moisture in the desert air and no light pollution from big cities, so the night sky is startlingly brilliant.

On the fifth day, we camped in a valley sloping east towards the Jordan. The sunrise was a real blaze of slowly emerging colours. Even more impressive was the night before. In the middle of the night, there seemed to be billions of stars and somehow they seemed nearer, almost like Christmas lights. I felt I could put my hand up. It made me think not only about our solar system but of the cosmos, its unimaginable size and its age of 13.8 billion years. You could easily have a feeling of being nothing underneath that starry sky. But my experience was the opposite. I felt the presence of God, holding all this in being. And not only God the creator but a loving God, who loves all things and every human being – God in whom we live and move and have our being.

### **Conclusion**

So for me the desert really became a special place. I understand why the word of God came to John the Baptist in the wilderness. When everything else is stripped away, God comes close.