

Dancing In The Desert

We are used to speaking of the desert as an austere place, the place where Jesus endures great hardship and is tested to the limit. This is by no means unique to human experience – many First Nation/Aboriginal traditions involve a Vision Quest or Walkabout as a time of solitude and personal reflection which is character forming and sets the tone for the rest of life's journey. This Eucharist takes us on a journey away from the bustle of the Jordan and the crowds gathered around John the Baptist and into the desert with Jesus for a time of self-reflection and determining the direction life will take. But this Eucharist also celebrates the end of the Vision Quest with a welcoming back into the community and dancing in harmony with the rhythms of the desert.

Water gushing,
playful giggling
children splashing
crowds pushing
silt turning the Jordan brown
no wonder we feel the need to escape
the sticky heat of sun baked mud
caked onto tired feet
no wonder we are driven
from the mayhem of the crowds
hankering after the ritual cleansing
offered by a rough-dressed, unkempt man
questions, rumours
spreading through the dusty region
like wildfire
voices descending from above
a dove soaring across the horizon.

Withdraw, clear your head
come away to a deserted place
try to make sense of it all
adopt the simple life
no market place or kitchen
no argument or conversation
basic needs put on hold
clarity of mind as well as body
the parched heat of the sun
shimmering trance like
over the endless expanse
of the rasping desert grains
no shelter
from the erosion of the stormy sands
gritty, abrasive
gouging out
the rocky wilderness
that is so far from home.

How tempting
the smell of soft baked bread
and promise of the fermenting wine
comfort food wafting roughened senses
mirage of that most longed for
fading to wind-honed pebbles

and blood stained earth
as your path draws near
how tempting
seems the distant earth
from the pinnacle of rock
just a small step
to quell the vertigo
to fulfil the desire
for solid ground
how tempting
from this place of isolation
where we are forced
to confront our deepest fears
and driven to seek solace
from the self we find the hardest to accept
the possibility of holding others
in our grasp
of harnessing nature's awesome might
and wielding the power
to create or destroy.

Thunder clouds roll
tearing across the never-ending sky
lightening forks into reddened rock
splitting earth in a deep-riven chasm
roughened clothing rips to shreds
tatters chaffing exposed skin
sand storms,
raging
pushing the body
to the edge of endurance
as we brace ourselves to face
the desert's inhospitable fury
this is my body
this is my blood
and gradually, as the storm subsides
we gather together
weather beaten and broken
tired and worn down
taken to the very edge of ourselves
we gather together
this is my body
this is my blood
do this in memory of me.

[share bread and wine]

Evening draws in
the desert skies aflame
with fiery reds
fading to burnt orange
pin pricked stars appear
on petrol darkening skies

the raging heat evaporates
as the night chill sets in
and we snuggle together
shadows encircling
near the crackling heat
of an open fire
the rhythmic beat of a clay drum
is taken up by the stringed kora
and gourd seed rattle
human voices tracing the melody
bodies swaying
whirling to the ebb and flow
of the underlying riff
human community
mortal flesh and divine spirit
dancing in harmony
with the heartbeat
of the desert.

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