

# Third Sunday in Advent

## THIRSTY GROUND AND SPRINGS OF WATER

Isaiah 35:1-10

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### Analysis by Marcus Felde

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing.*

*The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.*

*They shall see the glory of the LORD,  
the majesty of our God.*

*Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.*

*Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
"Be strong, do not fear!*

*Here is your God.*

*He will come with vengeance,  
with terrible recompense.*

*He will come and save you."*

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;*

*then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.  
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;*

*the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,*

*the grass shall become reeds and rushes.  
8A highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
the unclean shall not travel on it,  
but it shall be for God's people;  
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.  
9No lion shall be there,  
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
they shall not be found there,  
but the redeemed shall walk there.  
10And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Thirsty Ground (v. 7)**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Hands Weak, Knees Feeble*

We are not making much progress toward wherever it may be that we're going. We fail, we fall. Fools, we stray from an unclear path. Blind, we stumble. Lame, we limp. Deaf, we fall behind. "Are we there yet?" No answer comes. We see no landmarks. Our discouragement gives bad feedback to our bodies, making the situation worse.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *We Thirst*

And worst of all, our canteen is empty. We toss it away, because there is nowhere to fill it. Sand gets in our teeth, in our eyes. We begin to dry out. We cry out for water, but to whom shall we cry? No one hears, in this place where there is "no word." Frederick Niedner says out that the word *midbar* or

wilderness can mean both “no thing” and also “no word,” the latter being even more fatal to humans. Our tongues swollen, we no longer talk, much less sing.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *The Way Ahead, a Desert Track*

But ahead of us, as far as the dimmed eye can see, stretches more wasteland, more desert, more wilderness. Dried skulls by the roadside speak of others who have only made it this far. Can we make it much farther? Roadkill, are we? This is not the way of life.

**PROGNOSIS: Springs of Water (v. 7!)**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) :** *A High(er)way (Jesus)*

But the way of death all of a sudden becomes—by God’s might—a way of life! The wilderness is glad, the desert rejoices, the barren blooms. The future, the path forward, is no longer “a deathward drift from futile birth,” to quote Martin Franzmann. Death, witnessed in the cross of Jesus (“who will save his people from their sin,” Matt. 1:21; and whose death begets the opening of graves, Matt. 27:52) is the way of life. It will bring you to Zion rejoicing. God will come. . . (wait for it) . . . not to kill you. No! But to save you!

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *We Drink*

Waters shall break forth in the wilderness, streams in the desert, the burning sand shall become a pool—not to make the scenery picturesque but to guarantee we will always walk with a full canteen. Or not even need a canteen, because this will well up inside us unto eternal life. We believe, we drink. Before, the thirsty ground was stealing our water—now it gives it back, for our life.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Lame Ones Leap*

Now we're walking! No longer blind, we see our way forward. No longer lame, we skip and run like Amahl (Menotti's "Amahl and the Night Visitors"): "Look, mother! I can dance, I can jump, I can run!" It's a blooming symphony of joy, with the ground and the animals and the travelers—even fools—joining the chorus, as we run to Zion.