

"(Jesus) went up into a mountain to pray.....he was there alone." Matthew 14:23

Today we spent the balance of our time travelling in the wilderness of Judea. I was totally unprepared for the experience. I am Canadian. Wilderness means dense forest, underbrush you cannot see through, lakes and wild, wild rivers. Not in Judea!!

The only fresh water lake in Israel is the Sea of Galilee. The only fresh water stream here is the Jordan River, and by the time it reaches the Dead Sea, the Jordan is dead. While we are at it, the Jordan is sometimes a creek, sometimes a ditch, but never a river by Canadian standards. There is nothing like the Moira River in Israel. Rawdon Creek is in places three or four times wider than the Jordan.

So, I needed a new set of terms to describe wilderness. Desolate is the first one that comes to mind. It is a desert. Picture mountainous, hilly land, brown in colour....divest of greenery. When Jesus went up a mountain to pray, it was hot, it was dry, there were no trees, and the higher he got, the more he could see barren mountains and hills.

There is not a lot of wild life in the desert. There is nothing we would call a tree. As a matter of fact there is nothing green, little grass or ground cover.

Our journey today included time at Masada. This is the place where the Jewish uprising against Rome which began in 69-70 AD came to an end in 74. The Jewish Zealots (remember one of the disciples was Simon Zealotes...the zealot) they holed up on this mountain in what had once been one of Herod's palace sites. They had great food stores and lots of water stored in great cisterns, but realizing the Romans were about to breach their mountain stronghold, they committed what they believed to be the ultimate act of defiance. They took their own lives in preference to capture, and becoming slaves. Masada is a desert mountain. In every direction as far as the eye could see, mountains and hills, all barren and brown.

This is the precise kind of place to which Jesus withdrew to pray. It was distraction free. Because it was empty. The only food and water there, he would have had to take with him. No rocky mountain high.

In our journey today we have been continually moving to higher ground. Because it is February, we eventually saw flocks of sheep and goats tended by shepherds. What does the 23rd Psalm phrase "he makes me to lie down in green pastures" bring to mind? I have always thought of lush fields like those near the farmhouse in Madoc Township, grass a foot high or more waving in the breeze. Not here. Where the sheep and the goats were grazing there was a hint of sparse green, on otherwise dry brown earth.....this is the Judaen wilderness.

Jesus also said, "Let's go up to Jerusalem." That is what we have been doing all day. We have been travelling from the Dead Sea...240 feet below sea level to Jerusalem, 2,400 feet above sea level. Just as Jesus and the twelve did, we have been climbing up, and up, and up to Jerusalem. Walking in the footsteps of Jesus means coming to this city, and making that climb.

Here is your smile for the day. On the way, Rebekah rode a camel to lunch at the camp of "Abraham". Rebekah and I rode the camel, from "Abraham's" camp, along a mountain trail back to the bus.

Morley Mitchell,
sent in the love of Jesus