

### **Sermon for Advent 3 (Series A)**

**Text: Isaiah 35:1-10**

**Preached on 12-16-2007**

#### **Introduction:**

In the poem *Footprints in the Sand* a man is dreaming that he is walking along the beach. The beach represents his life. The footprints he sees in the sand are his and Jesus'. But he notices that when life got really hard, he saw only one set of footprints. So he turned to Jesus and said, "What gives? When I needed You the most, You weren't there!" Of course Jesus said, "Yes I was! You only saw one set of footprints because those were the times when I was carrying you." Now don't get me wrong. I like the poem and everything. But I always thought a better setting for it would be - not the beach, but the desert. I mean, what problems can a person really have walking along a serene beach with a beautiful sunset? A desert, on the other hand, would cause some real hardships: Scorching heat during the day, freezing cold during the night, and dehydration that can cripple a person so badly that he would have to be carried.

It is through such an unforgiving environment that we will walk with Isaiah this morning as we continue our Advent journey to the manger. But as we journey through the harsh environment of our lives, all of a sudden something wonderful will begin to unravel before our very eyes. We will begin to...

**Theme: See the Lord's Oasis Appear!**

**Part I: It is a beautiful place to be**

**Part II: There is a beautiful Way to it**

#### **Part I: It is a beautiful place to be**

In a place like the Sahara desert the average annual rainfall is less than one inch. With so little moisture in the air, the environment is really hostile. There is nothing to either trap or block the sun's rays. And so during the day temperatures can easily rise to over a hundred degrees. At night they can quickly drop to below freezing. What a place of contrast! What a rough place to be. God uses that kind of harsh and unforgiving climate as a picture of His coming judgment against Israel. In the previous chapter God said that the good and fertile land He had brought His people into was going to become a burning, sulfurous wasteland (**Isaiah 34:8-10**).

This prophecy was really directed against Israel's neighbors. However, Israel's capital city would soon be destroyed. The temple itself would lie

in ruins. Their sons would be killed in battle. And those few who survived would be hauled off to captivity. Why would God allow all this to happen? It is because the Israelites themselves had become like a barren desert. They were spiritually dried up. They were morally unfruitful, rejecting God and His promises over and over again. So God was going to discipline (or correct / train) His people for their lack of trust. And yet, before they were attacked; before this horrible prophecy was fulfilled, something wonderful began to unravel before Israel's eyes. After this time of judgment, God said He would bring about an oasis for His people. Unlike what they were about to experience, their final destination would be a beautiful place to be.

**Application:**

But when would Israel's time of refreshing come? Isaiah says, **"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy" (vv. 5-6).** In today's Gospel lesson, we heard John ask whether or not Jesus was the promised Messiah. Jesus told him to look at all the evidence: **"The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (Matthew 11:5).** In other words, Israel's time of refreshing would come with the birth of the Christ Child! Jesus came to rescue the Jews, and all people, from their scorched, dry, and barren lives. He rescued them in a way that nobody expected Him to: Not from the tyranny of the Romans or their suffering or poverty, but from their sins and the Hell their sins merited.

Jesus HAS DONE the same for us! Let's face it. Our lives can seem like a desert wasteland at times. When we loose someone we love, we can be left feeling empty and barren inside. When the love in a relationship dries up, it leaves us feeling alone and hopeless. When our health rises and falls as quickly as the temperature in the desert; when we loose a job and money is as hard to find as water in the desert; or even when nothing in particular is wrong, but boredom and depression set in, we feel like collapsing under the strain. BUT then we come to church! We hear God's Good News! Our souls get refreshed and renewed! Through Word and Sacrament God comes and establishes an oasis in our hearts. He convinces us that our sins ARE forgiven and that Heaven IS ours! What a beautiful place that is going to be!

**Transition:**

Each step we take through the barren wasteland of our lives is one step

closer to *Seeing the Lord's Oasis Appear!* Not only is it going to be a beautiful place to be, but there is also...

**Part II: There is a beautiful Way to it**

The phrase *burning sand* in verse 7 is literally *glowing sand* in the original Hebrew. Now the NIV translators took this *glowing* to mean that the desert sand is glowing hot. That is why they translated it, **“Burning sand” (v. 7)**. But many other translators have taken *glowing* to mean that the desert sand is glowing in its appearance. In other words: “Hey! That looks like water up ahead!” But when you arrive, you find out that it is nothing but a mirage. In the same way, there are all kinds of mirages in our lives. We can try and find comfort in our finances and all the nice stuff we have. We can try and find peace and love in our earthly relationships. We can try to escape from our problems by turning to drugs and/or alcohol. But what inevitably happens as we wake up the next day? We find that we are still in the desert. Only we are thirstier than we were the day before.

Imagine the relief of those people Jesus cured: The sick and the deaf and the mute and the lame and the leprous. Those are diseases that Jesus just took away. Imagine the relief those people felt when they learned that not only were their physical ailments cured, but the very sins that left them feeling so scorched and barren were gone as well. Friends, we don't have to imagine. We have that same relief. The best part is that we don't have to go wondering through the desert to find it. God comes to us, again through Word and Sacrament, and shows us the *Way* to His heavenly oasis. And what a beautiful *Way* it is!

**Application:**

Isaiah describes the *Way* to the Lord's oasis by saying, **“And a highway will be there; it will be called the *Way of Holiness*” (v. 8)**. If you were determined to cross the Sahara desert, a lot of planning would be required. You would need to have camels that could travel for days on very little water. You would need to make sure that you had some protection from the scorching heat. You would need to have some blankets packed to keep warm at night. You would need to take along plenty of fresh water. Even with all these preparations, the way across the Sahara desert would still be pretty tough.

That is how many people view the way to the Lord's oasis in Heaven. They ask, “You want to get to Heaven? Great! Here's what you have to do. You have to clean up your act. You have to improve your

lifestyle. You have to stop sinning. You have to be a Saint.” In part, they’re right! Perfection is a requirement for reaching the Lord’s heavenly oasis (**Matthew 5:48**). Who, then, has any hope of getting there? No one! BUT that’s precisely why God built a, **“Highway” (v. 8)**, providing an easy *Way* for all people to get to Heaven. Jesus said, **“I am the Way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6)**. What a *Way* God has provided! He sent us His own Son to meet (or live up to) the perfect requirements He had for us. What a beautiful *Way* to the Lord’s heavenly oasis!

**Conclusion:**

Most, if not all of you, know that I am from Belvidere, IL. If there is one thing Belvidere is known for, it is its Oasis (or rest stop). Some of you may be familiar with it. There is a McDonalds, a number of restrooms, a gift shop or two, and plenty of parking for cars and trucks. This Oasis is pretty hard to miss too. It can be seen from Interstate 90 well before its exit comes up. It has been there for as long as I can remember. It has provided rest and refreshment for countless numbers of people over the years. But I know that one day the Belvidere Oasis will no longer be there. It will cease to exist either before or on the Day when all the things of this world begin unraveling before our very eyes.

When we see the Lord appear in His heavenly glory, His holy angels will carry our resurrected bodies to a place of true rest and refreshment. On that Day we, **“Will enter Zion with singing and everlasting joy will crown our heads. Gladness and joy will overtake us, and sorrow and sighing will flee away” (v. 10)**. What (1) a beautiful place to be! What (2) a beautiful *Way* to get there! Make no mistake about it, one Day we will *See the Lord’s Oasis Appear!* Amen!