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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Life is a journey. Your life is a journey. My life is a journey. For each and every one of us, the journey of our life is unique. There is no one else in the history of the human race who has had a journey of life quite like yours. For some, the journey of life seems to be a walk through a rose garden, with mostly beauty and blessing experienced constantly along the way. For others, the journey of life seems to be a struggle through a desert wilderness, with mostly dryness and difficulty and sadness experienced constantly along the way. For most of us, the journey of life is a bit of a mixture of both. At different times in our journey of life we experience one or the other – on the one hand the dryness of the desert and, on the other hand, the beauty of the rose garden.

One of the great events of the Old Testament of the Bible was also a journey. It was a literal journey, not a figurative journey. But because so many people can relate to the idea of life being a journey, that Biblical journey, and the things that happened along the way on that Biblical journey, have been meaningful for countless people of faith who have looked to the Bible for a Word of God.

The Biblical journey, of which we speak, of course, was the journey of the Israelite people under the direction of Moses, from slavery in the land of Egypt back to freedom in their homeland, the land which was to become known as the land of Israel. This Biblical journey was remembered by the people of God in many ways because of the variety of experiences that the people had along the way. But one of the primary remembrances of the people was the manner in which God was with them on the journey. And the manner in which God made a way for the people through the desert ultimately to bring them to the Promised Land.

This way through the desert began with the crossing of the Red Sea on dry land, with the waters of the sea forming a wall on either side of the way. And the way through the desert continued with God's guidance experienced as a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night showing the way. And the people were fed along the way at God's gracious hand with manna and quail – manna in the morning and quail in the evening. Ultimately the journey ended with Joshua taking over for Moses and leading the people back into their homeland. And it was remembered how God had made a way for the people of God through the desert with wonders and mighty acts all along that way.

At the time of our first reading for this morning from Isaiah, chapter 35, the people of God found themselves at a later time once again living outside their homeland. This time they have been taken into exile in the land of Babylon. And once again they are longing to be able to journey back to their homeland and live in security there. Once again that journey would require a way to be made through the wilderness. And the prophet this morning speaks a word of promise that yes, indeed, another journey through the wilderness is about to take place.

Many miraculous things are said in this reading about the manner in which the wilderness would be experienced on that next journey home. But once again, the primary experience will be the presence of God along the way to help the people along. That presence of God is described in miraculous terms: the desert rejoicing and bursting into blossom, the people's hands and knees being strengthened, and the thirsty ground bringing forth springs of water.

And then the prophet speaks once again about the way which the Lord will make for the people through the desert, saying, "A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way...it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come (home) with singing; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

With the coming of John the Baptist, centuries later, the people of God received a new twist on the way of God being made on behalf of the people of God. This time it was John the Baptist who prepared the way for God to come among the people of God. John the Baptist came to prepare a way of understanding and readiness. And it was to be understanding about and readiness for the coming of the Son of God himself among the people of God.

Jesus came. And as Jesus matured and began to understand his purpose on this earth, he, too, recognized that his purpose was to make a way to God among the people of God. In his turn, Jesus was the

one who became the highway, the way to God even for each and every member of sinful humankind who would only believe.

He is the way for you, dear friend in Christ, through the journey of your life. No matter what the circumstances of your life from time to time or even continually along the journey, Jesus is the way for you to God and ultimately to the Promised Land. As he offers the way for you, you will not go astray. You shall walk as if on a highway – a peaceful highway, where even in the wilderness circumstances of your journey of life you shall know the peace of the Lord with Jesus as the Way. Amen.