

*Precious Pilgrim,*

*I want to tell you about the desert. I want you to be able to feel the heat, the dryness, the desolation. Yesterday we walked for two hours in this world, into the mountains, down into a canyon. At one point we could only get through the paths by turning sideways. Looking up, you could only see a sliver of light. Then we had to get on our stomachs and crawl like animals to get through the opening. We were right on the San Andreas Fault. The intensity of the squeeze mentally was just as oppressive as this physical squeeze. I wanted this experience. The desert had been calling to me, just as the ancient silence of Greek mythology. From the moment we flew over this arid world, I knew I wanted to get this world under my skin so that I might better understand it at a deeper level.*

*I'd experienced the desert once before when we visited Saudi Arabia. August in Saudi is truly a desert experience, but I didn't get to relish it -- to let it infiltrate me. For I was more concerned about our daughter having a heat stroke. None of my family would fall for, "Hey, let's spend a day in the desert." Instead, it was more like, "Mom, if we don't get air conditioning real soon, you're going to have a mutiny on your hands."*

*But yesterday was different. I went to the desert and relished it. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the Israelites. These people marched in my brain. God over and over used this world to fine-tune his people, to forge them into*

*iron. They became purposed, driven, obsessed, loyal, humble, reverent people - His people. Paul and the desert fathers of early Christianity all went to the desert for that very same reason - refinement - re-centering. Today in this 20<sup>th</sup> Century world we go to a spa to get rejuvenated. I question whether refinement in the desert might be time better spent.*

*Back to the belly crawl. I've always felt squeezed by Mathew, chapter 19, verse 24, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." I've always dwelled on the first part of the scripture and felt that and not listened to Christ saying in Mathew 19, verse 26b, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Crawling on my belly through this needle eye in the desert, a light bulb came on in my mind, "Hey, there's room enough. That's all you need. Room enough." Also, we're told our walk is to be straight and narrow. I used to see that as limiting, but it's not. It's good news! It's more direct. No room for wasted energy.*

*The canyon was straight and narrow and okay. At first, I saw very little life in this world, but an excellent guide showed us that the desert was a veritable supermarket and could meet all of our needs if we knew where to shop. There were ten of us following the guide. We couldn't help but play "Follow the Leader." There was no other choice - no room for an alternate route. Oh, if we could have that reality in Christ, oh, if we*

*could have that reality in Christ, no other route but His in every situation in our lives - His route - His path.*

*I believe that when Jesus came out of the desert, He brought with Him that desert reality. For the rest of His life, His purpose was etched indelibly in His mind. His road was straight and narrow - one way - His Father's. I believe that's what deserts produce - a setting of boundaries and limits - a refinement of purpose. We all don't have a desert in our backyard to foster this experience. Our deserts are more interior - life produced by interior or exterior situations and circumstances. I believe the Holy Spirit - the Bible - the Church can show us the straight and narrow way. Our guide is our Christ.*

*In the hotel sitting room where I'm writing, there is a lush garden mural over the fireplace with the inscription, "Garden of My Dreams." I believe our deserts lead to such a place as long as we follow our guide - our Christ. He says daily, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through Me." John 14:6*

*Yesterday I went to the desert and had an excellent guide who knew the way, but the fantastic good news is today and all my tomorrows and yours, we have the Guide, our Lord Jesus, who is the way. Lord, may we follow.*

*Your sister in Christ,  
Lucy*