**Small Group Discussion Guide**

**December 11, 2022**

Preacher: Reverend Raphael G. Warnock

Scripture: Isaiah 35:1

Sermon Title: The Desert and the Rose

***The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. (*Isaiah 35:1)**

Sermon Summary

Physically and spiritually desert spaces beckon us to come to terms with the “topography” of our personal and collective faith. If we look at the scope of our lives as landscapes or terrains we’re traveling, we’ll see we’ve been through or perhaps are currently in desert places. Represented as dry, barren, lifeless and lonely, the experiences associated with deserts reflect danger and hopelessness. These dangers are real and could harm or terminate us. Just like the effects of physical deserts, such as dehydration, heat exhaustion or respiratory failure pose imminent dangers to our bodies; hopelessness, disenfranchisement and ignorance are dangers to our souls. Yet, while deserts pose danger to our lives, God’s presence with us represents safety, salvation, and security while we transit desert places. Therefore, the prominent desert theme in the biblical text is associated with transitions between despair and hope, or naïveté and maturity or near-death experiences and salvation. The sermon exhorts the listeners to see God in the barrenness, vulnerability and loneliness of our “desert experiences” to understand: 1) What God is doing in the desert and 2) What God is doing with the desert. Lessons learned in the desert include:

1. Deserts are “in-between” places – The desert is not a destination for God’s people. We transition through deserts to overcome vulnerabilities
2. Deserts are quiet places – The silence of the desert is necessary to hear from God.
3. Deserts are places to grow – Within God’s miraculous order, God re-structures the natural elements of deserts to bring spiritual growth for His people (i.e., the desert Rose or Tupac’s Rose that grew from concrete)

Discussion Questions

1. Can you describe biblical characters that came to maturity in a desert?
2. Describe a desert-like experience that has shaped your faith.
3. What are the difficulties associated with being in a “transition” place?
4. How does quietness and aloneness inform your devotional life?
5. After reviewing the sermon, what does a Rose in the desert symbolize for you?