

The Hebrew people are in despair.

After their exciting escape from Egypt they now find themselves in an inhospitable desert with no food or water and they begin to question and wonder about God.

In the face of the disasters in Christchurch and Japan, we might do the same thing.

Who, what, where is God in his uncertain journey of life?

I once had the privilege of spending forty days on a retreat led by a group of Dominican sisters in the South Island. It was during some very dark days in my life's journey.

The retreat was entitled 'A Journey to Wholeness'. It was aimed primarily at people in Catholic institutions –nuns and brothers in holy orders.

I was the only non-catholic and the only person not in a religious order – although this only became clear to me as the journey unfolded.

Each person as given a spiritual director – a person with whom you spent a whole hour with every day talking about your spiritual life.

From the very first day my spiritual director asked me the question 'Tell me – who is your God?'

And she asked me that question every day for 40 days!

I spoke about the God of my ancestors, but she was not interested, 'no – tell me about your God...'

I spoke about the God of the Bible, but she was not interested, 'no - tell me about your God...'

I spoke about the God of the Church, but she was not interested, 'no tell me about your God...'

I wandered what the hell she was talking about...

One day she told me she wanted me to experience the sunrise.

This was June in the South Island and it was freezing cold.

I got up at some unearthly hour in the pitch black, wrapped myself up in jumpers, scarves, gloves, and woolly socks and I started to plod along the road towards the East.

It was a fascinating experience.

The air was biting cold, but very still. There was not a sound.

As daylight approached I could feel all the nuances of a new day dawning.

As light came the air changed – there was a light breeze caused by the warmth of the sun coming up beyond the horizon.

I found myself on a beach and with my back to the sea and to the eastern horizon. I bent down exploring the pebbles and rocks at my feet.

The sky was clear and although it was daylight and I could see clearly, the sun had not yet risen above the horizon.

And then all of a sudden the first of the sun's rays peeped over the horizon and a golden light shot across the beach and everything changed its perspective.

I was so surprised I stood bolt upright and spun around.

It was as though God had tapped me on the shoulder...

As I said, although I could see quite clearly now everything was bathed in a golden light and there was shadow and definition and colour that had not been there before.

And there was warmth as the rays of the sun shone upon the bare skin of my face.

I wept and shouted in delight.

That experience changed forever my perception and understanding of God.

From that moment I knew who my God is.

My God is known to me in the warmth of sunlight and in the beauty of shadow and texture; in the fragrance of the lavender in the delicacy of a rose.

My God is known to me in the surprise of any given moment – my God may tap me on the shoulder when I least expect it.

My God is in the power of the moving earth or in the devastating force of the flowing sea.

My God is in the tears of grief and loss and in the tears of happiness and joy.

My God is powerful and destructive, but delicate and tender.

My God laughs and cries with me and within me.

My God allows me to be myself and indeed is closer to me than the very breath that passes across my nostrils.

My God is the beating of my heart and the stirring of my soul....

My God is my doubting and my knowing, my health and my sickness....

for it is in God that I live and move and have my being...

All this from experiencing the sunrise...!

Not quite – but it was one of those epiphany moments that changed my perceptions for ever...

God did tap me on the shoulder and allowed me to drink freely from the flowing water that gushed from the rock when I was thirsty in the desert;

Christ took me to the well from which I could draw life giving water...

My spiritual director was a very wise woman and knew just what question to ask...

Who is your God?

With the events around us this is a very fair question and pertinent question for each and every one of us.

Who is your God?