

Jerusalem Sunday

May 28th, 2017

Readings

- Acts 1:6-14
- 1Peter 4:12-5:11
- John 17:1-11

Introduction

Several months ago, 25 lay women from the Diocese of Ottawa travelled to Israel and Palestine to learn and celebrate ministry with the women of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem. Ottawa and Jerusalem Dioceses have been in a formal covenant of partnership since 2011. The Ottawa group went to meet in person with their sisters in Christ and discover the rich political, cultural and religious history of their shared Christian faith.

Five reflections are offered here to the whole church in preparation for Jerusalem Sunday 2017. First please find three vignettes offered by Dr. Patricia Bays, a reflection from Ms. Hilary Cottee Rathwell and another from Ms Susan Lomas. Each illuminates differently the harsh realities of life as a Christian in Israel Palestine and a steadfast hope in the abundant love of God for all and creation.

The purposeful gaze of the experiences of these and other women is then turned upon Scripture. What follows are thoughts on the individual passages which will hopefully open our imaginations to the power of the Good News during this season of Ascensiontide.

Reflections

Theme: **Separation from land, family, identity**

Above the archway leading into the Aida refugee camp near Bethlehem is fixed a large iron key. To the residents of the camp, the key represents the homes from which they were displaced, as long ago as 1950. The camp was built at that time for the inhabitants of 38 Palestinian villages. Many families kept the keys to their family homes. But after almost 70 years, there is no prospect of fitting those keys in their original doors. Today the camp holds more than 6000 people within a half square kilometer. It is an established community of 3 or 4 story houses, with narrow winding streets, 2 schools, and high unemployment. Yet even here there is hope. The Alrowwad Center for Culture and Arts is a non-profit organization committed to teaching young Palestinians “Beautiful Resistance”, helping them feel proud of who they are through music, drama, photography, the arts, and some social services. Their vision is to empower women, youth and children, and to build partnerships based on respect of human rights and values, and conservation of Palestinian traditional culture and environment. They describe themselves as the “home of hope, dream, imagination, and creativity.” It was a privilege to visit and learn of their work.—*Patricia Bays*

Christians are a small minority in the Middle East, and Anglicans an even smaller population – about 7000 members in 5 countries: Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Borders and checkpoints create challenges for ministry, and a dwindling Christian population adds to the difficulties. Yet the astonishing thing is the number and strength of ministries of health and education, bring hope and healing to people of all faiths. 20 educational institutions provide learning opportunities for 6400 Arab children. Healthcare institutions include homes for the elderly, the Princess Basma Center for Disabled Children, clinics and hospitals. The Princess Basma Center now has a partnership with the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario to do research and treatment in the area of autism. In Nablus, a city of 300,000 people, there are only 800 Anglicans. But the Diocese runs a first-class hospital specializing in neurology and urology, as well as general medicine, obstetrics and orthopedics. Ministry is a challenge for a small Anglican community. But the diocese, working with other Christians and partners, responds to the needs in their communities , teaching respect and concern for people of all faiths.—*Patricia Bays*

The World Heritage Site of Megiddo is a *tel* or mound built upon the remains of as many as 25 or 30 different settlements, the earliest dating from 5000 BCE. The site was on a major trading route, the Via Maris, running from Egypt to the Euphrates, and many different nations conquered it, built settlements and were succeeded by others in their turn. Only a portion of its long and varied history has been uncovered. On our partnership visit, Megiddo seemed to me an apt metaphor for the Land of the Holy One. It is a land of many times and civilizations. It is a land of many peoples, each leaving their mark on the landscape and the culture. There are

ancient sites, like the Western Wall of Solomon's Temple. There are Christian sites, like the ruins of the synagogue in Capernaum where Jesus preached. There are Crusader castles and contemporary parish churches. Contemporary and ancient live side by side – the 20th century architecture at Yad Vashem, and the ancient excavations of the community at Qumran. Life in Israel and Palestine is many-layered. Muslims, Jews and Christians inhabit the land and are finding ways to live and work together, even in challenging circumstances. Meeting them and hearing their stories was for us too a rich and many-layered experience.—*Patricia Bays*

Where did I feel closest to Jesus on my visit to Jerusalem?

- In the desert (wilderness) with only the sand
- Looking toward the hills & seeing Jerusalem in the far distance
- The hope in people's eyes and their generous hospitality
- Times of quiet and reflection in this place of the Holy One, Jerusalem. There I felt Jesus was with me.

—*Hilary Cotte Rathwell*

Reflections on a trip to the Holy Land

When I sent that email in April 2014, expressing interest in participating in the trip to the Holy Land with 23 other women from the Diocese of Ottawa, I expected to take a traditional pilgrimage of the places I had read about in the Bible. It had not occurred to me that I would be meeting with Palestinian Christians or that I would in fact be visiting in Palestine and not just in Israel. As we prepared for our trip we read some amazing books and watched DVDs about the history and current political situation in Israel and Palestine, many which challenged some preconceived ideas I had about both the people and the places. As I read about Jewish settlements in the West Bank and challenges and barriers faced daily by Palestinians, I began to feel that finding a peaceful solution was going to be very difficult. However, the Palestinian Christians that we met demonstrated hope for the future and genuine love of their neighbours in the ministries that they operate. Hospitals, clinics, and schools have both Muslim and Christian clients/students and staff. The recurring theme is "Love one another". I was awed by their passion to help others and their faith in the opportunity for peace in the future. I continue to pray for all people in the Holy Land; for support for the ministries of Diocese of Jerusalem; and for a solution that will allow for a peaceful future. —*Susan Lomas*

Readings

Acts 1:6-14

This reading duplicates much of the reading set for Ascension Day and as so many are no longer able to take the time off work to go to church service during the week, there is no harm in repeating some of the same themes.

This marks an end of an era and so that there be no confusion the narrative is deliberately clear in Jesus' farewell. He has ascended and in so doing has ushered in a new age, where the believer will receive the power and comfort of Holy Spirit. It is nevertheless an age continuous with Jesus's ministry and as readers we are reminded of the necessity of friendship which Jesus models and announces earlier in the Gospel. (15:14-15) It is this friendship which finds both men and women, disciples all, in the upper room praying fervently. It is this friendship which provides the means of support in the face of adversity and /or disbelief and it is precisely this friendship which we as Companions of Jerusalem seek to foster in becoming companions one of the other.

In this narrative the reality that Jesus is no longer here on earth is made palatable precisely because the believer is asked to cling, not to Jesus, but rather the power that comes from when two or three are gathered in Jesus' name. Here the physical absence of Jesus gives birth to a new opportunity to know his presence in a different way.

And so as Companions of Jerusalem we not only seek those whose brokenness we might heal but rather also seek the living Lord in the companionship we can offer one another. There is nothing magical about Palestine or Israel. Nothing inherently more valuable or more legitimate. The land is sometimes by some people spoken of as The Holy Land but to focus on this is to miss the point of the Ascension which is to claim all lands as Holy and to understand that Holy Spirit brings us the courage to continue in faith.

1Peter 4:12-5:11

The reading from Peter reminds us that in every age there can be, has been and doubtless will be difficulties which will try our purpose and try our faith. As Companions we have committed ourselves to at least the safeguarding of the others' dignity in the face of at times horrible injustice especially with regards the land redistribution in Jerusalem and Palestine. We are an Easter people and with this in mind we endure the tribulations of this age but as well, as Companions we seek to uphold one another not simply in the committing of good deeds whether this be in terms of collecting funds but perhaps even more importantly in upholding one another in prayer. It is here that one of the more difficult themes comes into play and that is that the suffering of this age is to be joined in a particular way to the resurrected Lord.

If nothing else this passage ends with the certain statement that whatever else may happen in this life God will restore us should we stumble and give us strength in our times of weakness for “ To him belongs power forever” (5:11)

It is the thinking of this doxology that has long provided the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem with its understanding of Gospel mission as it established and maintains the many educational and medical facilities throughout its territories. These are facilities that are open to all who are in need, not just Christians, and it is the mission of the Companions of Jerusalem to find the means to help keep these going. In the midst of persecution and at times suffering the Episcopal Diocese has chosen to strive to establish communities marked by **Hesed**, an Old Testament term signifying steadfast loving kindness, rather than those marked by hierarchy and or a system of patronage.

Adversity there shall always be but this can be endured whenever Companions stand together.

John 17:1-11

Eternal life is to know Jesus and God. The question is then how do we do so? In community and in the breaking of the bread which empowers us to further the values of the kingdom of God. And here we return full circle to a previous comment about Friendship.

There are many things that the Companions of Jerusalem are to people, but of all of these it is the modelling of Companionship on our notions of friendship which are arguably at the centre of the Gospel of John. So ask yourselves what is it that makes a friend?

Jesus is no longer in the world, but we are. And we have chosen to be Companions of those in Jerusalem and hence take on board the fears and concerns of those forced to live a life on the margins. The Incarnation is over but we are still in the world and therefore Jesus' works are now in our hands, indeed we are to be his presence.

The question becomes, have we enough love, enough stamina, enough imagination to become Companions of those in the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem who seek our friendship? And if the answer is yes then how will we together better serve each other and the world in proclaiming the Gospel of the Risen Lord.

[Notes by The Rev. Professor Patricia G. Kirkpatrick, Chair, Canadian Companions of Jerusalem Advisory Council.]