

**Additional Jerusalem and Holy Land Sunday  
Worship Resources:  
Readings, Context, and Sermon Notes**

**The Revised Common Lectionary—Year A**

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## Readings for the Seventh Sunday of Easter (Jerusalem and the Holy Land Sunday)

### Acts 1.6-14

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

### Psalm 68: 1-10, 32-35

*Refrain:* **Exalt him who rides upon the heavens.**

- 1 Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered; \*  
let those who hate him flee before him.
- 2 Let them vanish like smoke when the wind drives it away; \*  
as the wax melts at the fire, so let the wicked perish at  
the presence of God. **Refrain.**
- 3 But let the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; \*  
let them also be merry and joyful.
- 4 Sing to God, sing praises to his name;  
exalt him who rides upon the heavens; \*  
Yahweh is his name, rejoice before him! **Refrain.**
- 5 Father of orphans, defender of widows, \*  
God in his holy habitation!
- 6 God gives the solitary a home and brings forth prisoners into freedom; \*  
but the rebels shall live in dry places. **Refrain.**
- 7 O God, when you went forth before your people, \*  
when you marched through the wilderness,
- 8 The earth shook, and the skies poured down rain,  
at the presence of God, the God of Sinai, \*  
at the presence of God, the God of Israel. **Refrain.**

9 You sent a gracious rain, O God, upon your inheritance; \*  
you refreshed the land when it was weary.

10 Your people found their home in it; \*  
in your goodness, O God, you have made provision for the poor. **Refrain.**

32 Let tribute be brought out of Egypt; \*  
let Ethiopia stretch out her hands to God.

33 Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; \*  
sing praises to the Lord.

34 He rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens; \*  
he sends forth his voice, his mighty voice.

35 Ascribe power to God; \*  
his majesty is over Israel;  
his strength is in the skies. **Refrain.**

## 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5: 6-11

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

## John 17: 1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you, for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and

yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

### **Note on the Readings for “Ascension Sunday”**

*While Ascension Day has historically been kept on a Thursday, as the fortieth day of Easter, some churches move the observance to the following Sunday, with the intention of making Principal Feasts easier to observe. While this is a commendable practice in itself, it may be difficult to combine the theme of Ascension with that of Jerusalem and the Holy Land Sunday. With this in mind, churches wishing to observe Jerusalem and the Holy Land Sunday are advised **not** to use the readings for Ascension Day (Acts 1.1-11; Psalm 47; Ephesians 1.15-23; Luke 24.46-53 or Mark 16.9-16, 19-20), but those listed above.*

# Exchanging an Immovable Peace for an Unchangeable Promise (2026)

Prepared by Jonathan Rowe

## Context

In some places, "peace" is often defined not by the presence of harmony, but by the absence of movement. You can see this vividly illustrated by the so-called "Immovable Ladder", a simple cedar-wood ladder resting on a ledge above the entrance to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. It has remained in the exact same spot since at least 1728.

The ladder is a product of the *Status Quo*—an established principle set forth in decrees going back to the middle of the 18th century. These decrees ensure that no "common area" of the holy sites can be altered without the unanimous consent of six different Christian denominations. Because agreement is so rare, very little ever changes, and when slight changes *do* slip in, they seem to always provoke fierce divisions, even brawls! Thus, the ladder serves as a stark visual of a "frozen peace"—a peace maintained by ensuring nothing ever changes, and that no one oversteps their boundary. In this environment, moving anything even a few inches is seen as an act of aggression.

As we enter 2026, such a frozen peace has been shattered by the reality of modern conflict. Archbishop Hosam's February 2026 Pastoral Letter speaks from a landscape where the status quo can no longer provide safety. Writing in the wake of the February 28 escalations that put the Diocese's schools, hospitals, and homes in the crossfire, the Archbishop describes a community that is "battered and bruised, but not defeated."

Crucially, the Archbishop encourages the church to lean on a different kind of "immoveable": the unchanging promise of Christ's peace. While the ladder represents a peace based on human walls and rigid tradition, the promise of Christ offers a peace that remains "immoveable" precisely because it is not tied to political borders or the absence of conflict.

For the Canadian Companions of Jerusalem, the context of our 2026 observance is a shift in focus from many stories in the news. We are less focused on the "stones of history" protected by decrees, than on the "living stones" of hope who must navigate a world where the old rules of engagement have failed.

## Sermon Notes

### I. The Trap of the "Immovable" (John 17:1-11)

- **The Peace of the Ledge:** In the Holy Sepulchre, the "Immovable Ladder" remains because of a peace defined by distance and rigid jurisdiction. It represents a human attempt to avoid conflict by ensuring nothing ever moves and no one ever touches. In our own lives, we often confuse this "frozen stasis" with the peace of Christ, choosing to stay on our own "ledges" rather than risk the friction of engagement.
- **The Prayer for Movement:** In the Year A Gospel, Jesus does not pray for his disciples to remain stationary or separated by decrees. He prays for a unity of

"glory"—a dynamic, active oneness that reflects the relationship between the Father and the Son. This unity is not found in the absence of change, but in the presence of a shared mission that requires us to step off our ledges and toward one another.

- **The Cost of the Status Quo:** While the status quo prevents an immediate argument between denominations, it also prevents growth, cleaning, and restoration. A "ladder mentality" in the church may keep a temporary, tenuous peace, but it ultimately leaves the "windows" of our mission dusty and inaccessible. Jesus' prayer calls us to a unity that is brave enough to move the objects we've grown too comfortable protecting.

## II. Defining the "Living Stones" (1 Peter 2:5)

- **The Architecture of Vulnerability:** One of the images that the Companions of Jerusalem keeps coming back to describes a "spiritual house" built of "Living Stones." Unlike the ancient, cold stones of the Holy Sepulchre that hold the ladder, a living stone is organic and responsive. To "let ourselves be built" is a passive verb—it requires us to stop being the architects of our own security and allow God to place us where we are most needed, often right up against those who are different from us.
- **The Diocese as the Mortar:** In the Middle East today, the "Living Stones" are the people of the Diocese of Jerusalem—the teachers, nurses, and priests who refuse to be "immovable" in the face of suffering. Through the **Princess Basma Centre** and **Al Ahli Arab Hospital**, they act as the mortar in a fracturing society. They show us that a "spiritual house" is not built of bulletproof walls, but of people who lean on one another to stay standing in the crossfire.
- **The Holy Priesthood of Presence:** 1 Peter calls these stones a "holy priesthood." In the current crisis, this priesthood is exercised by those who remain in place when others flee. It is a ministry of "presence" that offers "spiritual sacrifices"—the sacrifice of personal safety for the sake of communal healing. We join this priesthood not by traveling to the Land of the Holy One, but by supporting the living stones who ensure the Gospel remains a local reality, not just a historical memory.

## III. The Foundation of the Immovable Promise

- **Trading One "Immovable" for Another:** Archbishop Hosam's 2026 letter acknowledges the "tenuous peace" of the world but directs our weight toward a different anchor: the **unchanging promise of Christ's peace**. We are invited to trade the "Immovable Ladder" (a peace based on fear of change) for the "Immovable Promise" (a peace based on God's constancy). One is a burden we must protect; the other is a foundation that protects us.
- **Stability in the Shake:** When missiles fly and "diplomatic windows slam shut," the human-made Status Quo offers no comfort. However, the promise of Christ—"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you"—is the only thing in the Holy Land that truly cannot be moved. This promise allows the church to act with clarity and love even when the ground beneath it is shaking.

- **Building the Bridge:** A bridge requires an immovable anchor on both sides of a chasm. By leaning on the "Immovable Promise," the Diocese of Jerusalem can serve as a bridge between warring factions. Perhaps it is only when we focus on the peace that Christ offers that we are finally able to "refuse to see our neighbors as enemies, whether in Tehran, Tel Aviv or at military bases in the Gulf." As Canadian Companions, we help anchor that bridge from our side through prayer and advocacy. We don't support the Diocese to preserve a museum of holy spaces, but to participate in a "spiritual house" that stands firm on the only promise that survives the fire.

# Living and Serving as a Christian Minority (2023)

*Prepared by Canon Dr. Martin Brokenleg, OSBCn*

## Reflection Notes

- In both settings of Palestine/Israel and Canada, the Christian faith is in a setting of historical and contemporary conflict.
- The state of Israel functions as the settler much like Canada is primarily the settler in North America. Palestinians function as the indigenous party much like Indigenous First Nations function in Canada.
- Historical policies and laws created situations of conflict, eg. the Balfour Decision in the Middle East; Crown and treaty decisions in Canada.
- Historical conflicts become embedded in social dynamics of Israel and Canada as racism, prejudice, and mistrust. Violence erupts on occasion, policies in both locations oppress some members of each location.
- How do we envision God's preference for the poor (Palestinians, Indigenous Canadians) and call for justice from the powerful (Israelis, Canadians) for the disempowered (Palestinians, First Nations)?
- Canada is moving toward a period of reconciliation. What might this look like in Palestine/Israel?
- How can the Christian faith inform "walking humbly with God" in both locations? Any clues from Melchizedek and Abram in Genesis 14?

# The Jerusalem of Your Heart and Soul (2020):

*Prepared by Canon Dr. Martin Brokenleg, OSBCn*

## Context

In recent years more than four million travelers visited Jerusalem annually. This year travel is not recommended but we can still visit this sacred place in spirit and thought. We can consider our fellow Christians in the Diocese of Jerusalem, and their neighbours, to ask a blessing for them.

Similar to the Celts, the concept of place is central in the spirituality of Indigenous peoples. Place provides more of a spiritual connection than a time-related observance. For Indigenous people a pilgrimage is valued more than a commemoration. Although physical pilgrimage would be ideal, a spiritual pilgrimage has deep value.

Indigenous spirituality does not perceive dualities, which separate the physical from the spiritual, the sacred from the ordinary, nor the heavenly from the earthly. So, in the eyes of Indigenous Christians, the contemporary city of Jerusalem is not separate from the ancient city of Leviticus and King David. This current city is the location of the heavenly New Jerusalem envisioned in the book of Revelation. Being in that place, whether physically or spiritually is to encounter a dwelling place of God. But doesn't God also appear in the sacred land of Canada?

As you prepare for Jerusalem Sunday this year, listen to this passage with an Indigenous heart:

*They confessed they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them. (Heb. 11:13b-16)*

## Sermon Notes

*Prepared by the Rev. Canon Dr. Richard LeSueur*

### **Engaging listeners:**

Consider the theme of pilgrimage, physical or spiritual. Notes on pilgrimage in Christianity, Judaism and Islam follow. We have also added brief personal remarks by committee members of the Companions of the Diocese of Jerusalem for possible inclusion in a homily. All of these refer to the holiness of Jerusalem. Bp. Ingham's entry recounts the darkness that surrounds the holiness of Jerusalem. If you are providing a virtual homily, you might search for videos of Jerusalem at sites such as YouTube for inclusion or for reference for your congregation.

Videos available on [anglican.ca](http://anglican.ca) include Living Stones: Faith and life in the Holy Land and Prayer for Jerusalem Sunday.

**Pilgrimage:**

Christian theology makes no provision for pilgrimage. The word 'pilgrimage' does not appear in the New Testament nor in the teachings of the early church.

The whole thrust of the Christian message is that the disciples of Jesus are to go out to the "ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) From the Mount of Olives the resurrected Christ commissions the disciples to go out to the world; baptize, teach, make disciples...and know that I am with you to the end of the age. (Matt 28:19-20) The implication is to leave Jerusalem behind.

Christianity emerges as a spiritual tradition with no specific sacred territory. In the NT epistles if there is a spiritual 'destination' for Christians it is to be "in Christ." There is no need to be in Jerusalem or in Bethlehem but to be "in Christ" rooted and built up in him. (Col 2:7) If one speaks of Jerusalem it is the heavenly Jerusalem "our mother and our hope." (Gal 4:26) "Set your eyes on the things above." (Col 3:2)

**Judaism and Islam:**

By contrast, pilgrimage was an integral aspect of Judaism and Islam. In Judaism the annual pilgrim feasts were mandatory; expected of every Jew. Three times a year one went up to Jerusalem to the Temple for Succoth, Passover and Pentecost. One's faith was renewed in the practice of going up together in community. The final 34 psalms of the Book of Psalms were the 'pilgrims hymnbook' with psalms of ascent sung by joyous pilgrims as they approached the Holy City.

In Islam, pilgrimage is one of the five pillars of observance. It is expected that if one has the funds and the physical ability to make the pilgrimage to Mecca you are to 'make haj' (pilgrimage) at least once in your lifetime.

In other world religious traditions pilgrimage can be detected as a recurring spiritual practice. Pilgrimage has been called an instinct of the spiritual life.

**Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land:**

The earliest recorded special visit to Jerusalem occurred in the year 170 CE. Melito, Bishop of Sardis (Sardis is near Ephesus) made a scholarly visit to confirm aspects of the Gospel accounts for himself. Thirty years later, Alexander from Cappadocia visited the land "to inquire of the places" and "to pray." He demonstrated the principle aspects of pilgrimage; the desire to engage a geography of spiritual significance and to do so devotionally. Over the following thirty years further recorded visits occurred by Origen and other Christian leaders and scholars.

Then in the early 300's Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea Maritima (located on the Mediterranean coast about a half hour drive north of present-day Tel Aviv) produced a gazetteer of the holy land listing 340 locations that corresponded to the gospels. The Onomasticon (places names in scripture) became a handbook for the swell of Byzantine Christians making pilgrimage to the land. Eusebius is credited as the first to refer to the biblical lands as the "Fifth Gospel." What this means is that the land itself, its topography, climate, agricultural variations, locations and proximities all together serve as a fifth gospel that can inspire startling fresh insights into the other four gospels.

By the 4th century Christian pilgrimage had come of age. A new devotional practice had arisen in the imagination of Christians sending thousands to visit the land and prayerfully

encounter the gospel accounts on location so as to return home with renewed vigor and faithfulness.

(see essay by Peter Walker “Pilgrimage in the Early Church” in Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage, Bartholomew and Hughes 2004)

Without exaggeration, Christian pilgrims to the biblical lands since then, over 17 centuries, always joined in the worship of the local Christian community, sought the comfort of Christian guest houses and monastic centres and requested local Christians to present the places of spiritual significance. Oddly, this cannot be said of many Christian pilgrimage tours to the holy land today. Very often now Christian pilgrims are not taken by their Guides into Bethlehem, are not allowed to shop in the local Christian shops but are taken to the shopping districts of another ethnicity, are not taken to worship with the local Christian community on Sundays, and are presented with an experience and commentary that cannot easily be described as “multi-narrative.” Christian Pilgrims to the land of the Holy One need become informed; need to ask for a Christian guide, ask to worship on Sundays with the local Christian community, ask to visit for instance one of the magnificent outreach ministries of the Anglican church in the land such as the centre on the Mount of Olives serving children with disabilities called the Princess Basma Centre. Why is this important?

**Gospel: Jesus prays for the whole body of believers: “May they all be one.”**

The gospel reading presents the conclusion at the end of Jesus’ Farewell Discourses. (John chapters 14–17) In this culminating section of Jesus’ prayer he prays no longer only for his disciples. Instead, looking to the future, he prays for all who will believe saying, “May they all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” The mission purpose of lifegiving witness to the world is hinged to the unity of the Body. The love of God is revealed in the koinonia of the Christian community. “The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” The sending of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (promised earlier in the discourse) heals a broken koinonia. (Genesis 3-4, Rom 1:18-3:20) God’s action of restored koinonia, through the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, fashions a pilgrim community, reconciled in Christ and sent into a broken world as agents of God’s love, healing and compassion. “You will know them by their fruits.” (Matt 7:16)

**Jerusalem Sunday:**

Jerusalem Sunday invites particular attention and prayer for one of the principal global partnerships of our Anglican Church of Canada; the people, churches and ministries of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East. Who are they? They are a remnant community spread thinly across the Middle East and Jerusalem. They are part of a Christian minority in these lands. They face complex contextual challenges affecting every aspect of their lives. Even though millions of Christian pilgrims, for instance, visit the land of the Holy One in hopes of walking on the stones where Jesus walked those Christian pilgrims rarely pause to notice, or worship with, or learn about the “living stones” of the local Christian community.

The Anglican Church of Canada has had a long and meaningful relationship with the Anglican (Episcopal) Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East. They are a diocese of some 7000 members formed into 30 parishes who worship in the name of Jesus and serve faithfully in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. They oversee an enormous outreach ministry of some 30 institutions, employing more than 5000 people providing education, vocational training, medical care in hospitals and clinics, rehabilitation for the hearing impaired, care for children with disabilities, and residential support to the elderly. They are a vibrant faithful community offering a bold witness to the compassionate love of God in action. They need to know that they are not forgotten, not ignored, but recognized and valued as part of our oneness in Christ.

So today we will pray for them. In some Canadian parishes the open collection on Jerusalem Sunday will be directed to the National Church / Canadian Companions of Jerusalem to strengthen the ministry of the Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City, operated by the Diocese of Jerusalem. Be generous.

## Homily Notes

The following reflections by several members of the Companions of Jerusalem Advisory Council offer invitations to worship leaders to reflect upon Jerusalem of Your Heart and Soul, at a time when physical pilgrimage in the Land of the Holy One is not possible, and yet, cries for peace and reconciliation in that Land continue to be heard and felt.

Archbishop Linda Nicholls is the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada and a member of the Anglican Roman-Catholic International Commission

*At a meeting of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission in Jerusalem in 2018 we went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for an early morning mass in the RC Chapel near the site of the crucifixion and upstairs from the site of the sepulchre. As two communions on a path of reconciliation, in the city where such pain of division exists between faith communities, it was particularly poignant to be invited to preach a homily in that liminal space between a place of death and the place of the resurrection. We live in liminal times between our own hopes for a new life—for the fullness of the kingdom of God while we live now in the midst of pain and uncertainties. So we hold on to the promise of the resurrection even as we live daily in the midst of death. That experience in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre will be a touchstone memory for me and an icon of our daily life.*

The Rev. Canon Dr. Martin Brokenleg, OBSCn, is a member of the Canadian Companions of Jerusalem Advisory Council, and Prior of the Canons of the Order of St. Benedict, Victoria, British Columbia.

*Many years ago I approached the entry to the Jerusalem Church of the Resurrection in the company of fellow clergy. We paused to buy candles from an elderly woman who sat in the church courtyard, including a donation in addition to the candle price. She thanked us in Russian, which one among us spoke and we heard her story in translation.*

*When she was 12 her parish priest in Russia announced a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He tied a white scarf to a processional cross and the people followed him, arriving in Jerusalem two years later, having walked the entire way. The woman said they visited all the holy places. Six months later, when the congregation was going to return to Russia, the girl begged her parents to let her stay so she would never have to leave the holy places. Eventually they agreed and helped her find a woman who rented her a closet in an alley to sleep in. The elderly woman said that, over the years, she sold enough candles to pay for her closet sleeping place and buy a little bread. She told us it was the joy of her life never to have left the holy city from the time of her childhood.*

*I often think of her. She was old when I heard her story more than 30 years ago. She lived where my heart wants always to be.*

The Rev. Professor Patricia G. Kirkpatrick is Chair of the Canadian Companions of Jerusalem Advisory Council and Professor of Old Testament Studies, McGill University and Montreal Diocesan Theological College.

*One such time of blessedness was as a consequence to my mother. While she was visiting me in Jerusalem she became friends with the Russian Orthodox Abbess of the convent on the Mount of Olives. As a consequence to this friendship I was fortunate enough to be invited for an audience with the Abbess.*

*Abbess Theodosia spoke very little English and my Russian, to my embarrassment was almost non-existent but we both spoke French, she, an incredible courtly French as she was the generation of Russians who grew up before the revolution. I had come to pick up a letter for the Russian Orthodox Bishop she had known and who now resided in Montreal. I was returning to Montreal to see to some personal matters before returning to Jerusalem to continue my studies. My mother, also a native born Russian and fluent in the language had assured the Abbess that I was willing to take a letter and some small trinkets to the Bishop.*

*The Abbess was in her 80's with a kindly and gentle demeanor. The year was 1977-1978 and she was undertaking a restoration of the Church of the Ascension. She took me around the restorations which included the wall frescoes being restored by the 80-year-old nun Thaisia, along with a bevy of younger sisters. At a certain moment she indicted two chairs and we sat down. At this moment she asked to listen to my story. Why was I in Jerusalem? Why was I not confirmed in the Russian Orthodox Church and other such questions. She could hardly believe that I was being sponsored by the Anglican Diocese of Montreal to proceed towards ordination the idea being so foreign to her. But, it only took a few moments before she was on track again with my story and this time there was a certain earnestness to her listening. She was so wonderfully gracious and so anxious to show me around the beautiful nunnery that I almost forgot why I was there. Indeed, if I remember correctly I even contemplated joining her order of nuns.*

*We then went to the window of her study and prayed looking out onto the walls of the Old City. I cannot remember what we prayed, I do remember thinking that God was with us and that holiness had entered our hearts. As we parted the Abbess took my hands in hers looked deep into my eyes, gave me her blessing, warned me that as a woman ordination would be a difficult path to forge, but that she could tell that God had granted me the courage enough to withstand the ordeals to follow.*

*It was an experience I have never forgotten and if truth be told was far more moving than the service of ordination itself. For one brief moment our differences faded into the abyss of Christian love. This love I have always hung on to and tried to remember as I continue in discipleship. We are here to support and encourage one another in steadfast loving kindness to incarnate Christ's love in all our seemingly insignificant ways.*

The Rt. Rev. Michael Ingham is a member of the Canadian Companions of Jerusalem Advisory Council and retired bishop of the Diocese of New Westminster.

#### *Getting Into Gaza*

*As you approach the daunting razor-wired wall that separates Israel from the Gaza Strip, a large sign says "Welcome to Erez Crossing." It's a two hour drive downhill from Jerusalem through cultivated farmland and hilltop towns. But the scenic pleasantries disappear as the gun towers come into view. A tethered surveillance balloon hangs in the air supervising a wide swath of the no-man's land that separates Israel from the Palestinian territory, half a kilometer away.*

*The crossing involves four steps. First, you have to apply for a permit to enter Gaza, which requires 30 days notice. You can't just show up. Second, at Erez you hand over the permit and your passport to Israeli border officials. They are housed in a large modern warehouse-like building, much like the immigration gates you would pass through in an airport. On the day we arrive, the large new hall is empty except for young Israeli men without uniforms carrying large automatic weapons. Palestinians who cannot get in from Israel wait outside in the parking lot. We are ushered politely through after being asked to explain the purpose of our visit. Then you walk through a tunnel in the wall.*

*On the other side is a featureless wasteland. In the distance stands another gate and a straggling fence. A bus waits to take you there. Strict warnings about photography mean you can't take this image home except in your memory. You cross the open ground in the bus, and the third step is an Arab checkpoint belonging to the PLO.*

*It's a dusty scattering of plastic chairs under a corrugated metal roof. We are met by our driver, sent out from the Ahli Arab Hospital to pick us up. He takes our passports and joins a slow line to a dirty window to get further required entry slips. Around us are people—mostly women and children—*

*waiting to go out to Israel. They can't cross over for hours, for reasons we never discover.*

*After a while we board the hospital bus and drive slowly towards another gate and an even more dilapidated fence. Here is the last checkpoint; step four. This one is run by Hamas.*

*We step over rubble and discarded tires into an old trailer. Inside sit two very large men, and a younger one who bids us sit for a while. He painstakingly checks our passports against the records on his old computer, which is powered by electric cables strung against the wall and disappearing through the trailer roof. His printer slowly produces sheets of paper which I see are our entry permit applications. I belatedly realize that the people giving us permission to enter Gaza are the Hamas.*

*He asks each one of us "what is your job?" He does not understand when the Primate replies "archbishop." He frowns. The Primate's passport is ominously put aside. He asks another—"teacher" is the reply—and he types this into his machine. This is repeated for each of us until he appears satisfied with his work (having settled for 'minister' for the Primate and me). Then we have to go to another trailer.*

*It's not clear what happens here. We sit for a while, and then we are told to go. Back into the bus. On to Gaza City.*

*No welcome signs here.*

# Celebrating the Ministry of Women (2017)

## Context

*Prepared by Patricia Bays*

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 Cottee Rathwell

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

## Sermon Notes

*Prepared by Patricia G. Kirkpatrick*

**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.