

Jerusalem Sunday is observed on the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter, the Sunday between Ascension Day and Pentecost, events that happened in that city two millennia ago. In 2018, that date May 13 is also the day in which we in North America observe Mothers' Day. The Board of the Canadian Companions of the Diocese of Jerusalem chose a theme for this Sunday "Mothers of Jerusalem," an opportunity to reflect on the role of women in the story of Jesus, the work of mothers and others in the search for peace and justice today, and the image of Jerusalem in Galatians 4:26 – "Jerusalem above; she is free and she is our mother," the new Jerusalem, the city from whose centre flows the waters of life.

### **The lectionary readings**

The lectionary readings assigned for today say little about Jerusalem or Mothers' Day. **Acts 1:15-17, 21-26** describes the eleven apostles and the women returning to Jerusalem after the Ascension, uncertain what to do next but continuing in prayer with other disciples. (At that time there were about 120 followers of Jesus.) Peter reminds them of some unfinished business, the need to choose another to replace Judas and to bring the number of apostles to twelve, a reminder of the Church's continuity with the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthias is chosen to take up this ministry. Throughout the history of God's relationship with humankind, God has called and continues to call particular people to ministry and service. **Psalm 1** praises those faithful followers who delight in God's law. The gospel reading, **John 17:6-19**, speaks of Judas "the one destined to be lost" and prays for God's protection on all Jesus' followers. Whoever has the Son has life, the gift of God, as **1 John 5:9-13** reminds us. These themes of God's care and guidance, of God's call to ministry, of new life in Jesus Christ, all find resonance in our experience as Christians and in the life of Christians, the "living stones," in the Land of the Holy One.

### **Other themes**

But there is much other biblical material that can provide a background for preaching today.

### **Pilgrimage**

The Psalms of Ascents, sung by ancient pilgrims climbing the hills to the Jerusalem Temple (Psalms 120-134), speak of the joy of the faithful in travelling to this holy place.

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord. Now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. (Psalm 122:1-2)

Jerusalem has for centuries been a place of pilgrimage for followers of the three Abrahamic faiths, one of the "thin places" where we feel closer to God's presence, in touch with a reality greater than ourselves. A sermon on pilgrimage might develop in this way.

A pilgrimage is a journey with a purpose, a journey with a destination and a goal. One goal might be to visit the Land of the Holy One to connect with the stories of God's relationship with humankind and to discover our place in that story. But we can go on a pilgrim's quest here at home as well. What might we learn about ourselves and about God on our Christian journey?

A pilgrimage is a journey made in company with others on a similar quest. A pilgrimage is a place for story. Pilgrims tell stories along the way. Think of *The Canterbury Tales*. What stories would we share from our experience?

Pilgrimage requires preparation. Pilgrims must take supplies for the journey. In addition to passports and visas and sensible shoes, there are other things we need to pack for our journey – an inquiring mind, an adventurous heart, a generous spirit, good humour, an openness to the unexpected. What ought we to take on our pilgrimage?

### **Jerusalem**

Jerusalem is one of those places that exist on many levels. It is a real city, a modern city with traffic and businesses, municipal government and the conveniences of modern life, people who live there, work and go to school there. It is an ancient city, with buildings from many centuries right up against modern construction. There are literally many layers of life under our footsteps and there are places where we can see all those layers. There are buildings that date from Jesus' day and before, and from centuries between then and now, and buildings and sites that represent many different cultures and groups.

But, on another level, Jerusalem and other places in this land are places of song and story. They exist in legend and live in the minds of people who have never seen them for themselves. The stories of the temple, of angels and shepherds in Bethlehem, of the blind man by the gate and the lame man by the pool, of small boats on the Sea of Galilee – all these are images of Jerusalem and Palestine that live in our minds and are as much part of our story as they are of the Jerusalem story. There are things we find familiar, though we have never been there before. And, of course, there are things that are very different from what we imagined.

Jerusalem is past and present. But it is also future. For Christians, the image of Jerusalem contains also the image found in the Book of Revelation – “the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.” (Rev. 21:10 ff.) In the mind of the author, the city is a vision of beauty and light. Through it flows the water of life. In it is the tree of life, “whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.” This is a city to which all nations will come, the place of righteousness and peace for which all long. This image of Jerusalem as a city of peace can be a springboard to speak about the work of reconciliation and peace so important in the life of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem today. See notes below on Archbishop Suheil Dawani's interview with the BBC.

Clare Amos, in her book *Peace-ing Together Jerusalem*, speaks of the “valued and appropriate place that love for Jerusalem holds in Christian theology.” She quotes this statement issued by the 8<sup>th</sup> World Council of Churches Assembly in Harare in 1998:

We are reminded that this city is central to the faith of Christians. In this city our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, died and rose again. Jerusalem is the place where the gift of the Spirit was given and the church was born. For the writers of the New Testament, Jerusalem represents the new creation, the life to come and the aspirations of all people, where God will wipe away all tears. (p. 95)

At the same time, we are called to acknowledge the love for Jerusalem in the hearts of those of other faiths, and to model Christian love in our relationship with them.

### **Mothers of Jerusalem**

This topic may recall to those of a certain age and background the Victorian hymn, “When mothers of Salem their children brought to Jesus”, recalling Jesus’ words in Mark 10:13-16. Jesus in Judea rebukes the disciples and welcomes women and children. There are other women of Jerusalem that preachers might like to recall. There is Huldah, prophet of Jerusalem (2 Kings 22:14-20), speaking the truth to King Josiah. This woman is a messenger of God’s word. There is the prophet Anna, an elderly woman living in the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer. (Luke 2:36-38) When the child Jesus is brought to the temple, Anna recognizes this special child and speaks of him to “all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.” Anna and Simeon live in hope that God’s plan of salvation will come to fruition. In the child Jesus they see the fulfilment of that hope, and not for Jerusalem only but for the whole world. There are the women who follow Jesus right to the end of his earthly life, women whose generosity has financed Jesus’ ministry (Luke 8:1-3.) And there are women of today, whose stories appear below.

John Peterson, in his guide to the Stations of the Cross *A Walk in Jerusalem*, comments on the eighth station, Jesus Talks to the Weeping Women. He writes, “Jerusalem has always known pain, and it has always known the tears of women – Armenian women, Jewish women, Palestinian women, Druze women – as they have waited and have watched their husbands, their sons and daughters, their brothers and sisters, go off to the slaughter of war or to the punishment of prisons and detention centres.” Women and men light candles and weep for those in prison and distress.

And Jesus himself uses the image of Mother Hen to describe his longing to gather all of Jerusalem under his care (Matthew 23:37.) Jesus wept at the thought of the destruction to come unless humankind turned from its unjust and selfish ways and returned to obedience to God, to the selfless loving way that Jesus came to show. See

below Dawna Wall's reflection on the mother hen, who gives her life to protect her chicks.

### **The Diocese of Jerusalem today**

Christianity has existed in the land of the Holy One since the time of Christ. The oldest Christian communities in the world have their origin here. Christianity spread rapidly throughout the known world. Questions of doctrine produced splits in the church, and each family of churches began to develop its own approach to the Christian faith. After the Arab Muslim conquest of the Middle East and North Africa in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Christians became a minority in this area. Jerusalem today is home not only to different faiths (Jewish, Muslim, Christian) but also to several different expressions of Christianity.

In 1841 the Church of England and the Prussian Lutheran Church set up a joint bishopric in Jerusalem. It has been a solely Anglican bishopric since 1881. In the mid 1970s the Diocese of Jerusalem was restructured and now includes churches in 5 countries: Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, with about 7000 members in almost 30 parishes. You can find more information on their website [www.j-diocese.org](http://www.j-diocese.org) Though numbers of Christians have been declining over some years, yet Christians throughout the region continue to work for peace and reconciliation. The website contains this goal statement:

The Diocese of Jerusalem covers five countries and is home to almost thirty parishes. Our healthcare and education ministries are active and growing across the region with the provision of hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation centers, and schools. Alongside these ministries the Diocesan Peace and Reconciliation department continues to work at strengthening the interfaith dialogue with our fellow Jews and Muslims. Our Kids4Peace programme in turn strives to educate the next generation in a language of tolerance and acceptance.

On that website you can find an interview in January 2018 with the present Archbishop Suheil Dawani by a BBC reporter. Archbishop Dawani brings a message of peace and hope. He tells us that, in Jesus' birth, ministry and resurrection, "Peace is his message to the city." Jesus wept for the absence of peace and love; he is still weeping and looking for peace and stability. Peace will not come by itself, but we must work for it and encourage political leaders to work for mutual respect and harmony. The Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem is committed to the work of reconciliation.

### **Women of the Diocese of Jerusalem**

As the diocesan website states, "As women comprise half of our parishes and society, the empowerment of women is an essential part of Bishop Dawani's vision for women's ministry. Several regional meetings are held each year in different areas of the Diocese to prepare for the bi-annual Women's Conference." Women

gather from the several countries that make up the Diocese to pray and learn together, to share experiences and stories, and to learn about diocesan ministries.

There are frequent regional workshops designed to equip women with communication and leadership skills. Topics discussed at conferences have included such questions: What is my identity as a woman? What is the role of youth in the church and the challenges they face? How do I represent our diocese when I travel? What do I need to tell visitors to our diocese? The bishop's wife Shafeeqa Dawani is the coordinator of Women's Work in the Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East and has played an important role in fostering and encouraging the empowerment of women. This affirmation appears on the diocesan website describing the ministry of women.

#### Affirmation

We believe in ourselves as women.

We believe we are called by God

To minister to our world.

We acknowledge our creative power.

We choose to extend this power in service

To a world in need.

We promise ourselves

To celebrate the presence of the Holy

Through the affirmation of all people

Affirming the equality of women

Leaving no person unnamed.

Visitors to the Diocese of Jerusalem are welcomed by the generous hospitality of the women of the diocese. On the 2016 pilgrimage of women from the Diocese of Ottawa, visitors had the opportunity of meeting with women in St. George's Cathedral, in Zababdeh, and in Nazareth, to share stories about their lives and to discover what it means to be part of the Christian family. It is encouraging to meet these "living stones," the men and women from which the church is built



**Women of Zababdeh**





### **Women of St. George's Cathedral with Ottawa visitors**

### **Mothers at The Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre for Disabled Children ([www.basma-centre.org](http://www.basma-centre.org))**

This centre was established in 1965 as a home and treatment centre for children with physical disabilities. Its vision is that all Palestinian children with disabilities have access to quality health services and inclusive education, can participate and have influence, have hope and opportunities. It provides rehabilitation services. It has a school for 600 children, of whom about 30% have disabilities, a model for inclusive education. The Centre is a pioneer in autism treatment (now in partnership with the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa and the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa.)

The rehabilitation program is accompanied by a program to empower mothers and families. Families participate in the rehabilitation of their children. The mothers receive full accommodation for the whole period of the child's stay; during which they receive support and educational workshops. They also attend every therapy session with their children and are trained by the therapists to perform some of the activities when they return back home.

## Other organizations working to empower women and children

### **Kids4Peace ([www.k4p.org](http://www.k4p.org))**

Founded in the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem in 2002 by leaders at St. George's College and St. George's Cathedral, Kids4Peace is a global movement of youth and families, dedicated to ending conflict and inspiring hope in divided societies around the world. It operates international summer camps, leadership programs and a six-year, year-round program for more than 500 Palestinian, Israeli and North American youth. It is now an independent non-profit organization but many Episcopal/Anglican congregations are involved. Kids4Peace connects young people and families, and prepares youth to be ambassadors of hope and workers for peace.

**The Alrowwad Center for Culture and Arts ([www.alrowwad.org](http://www.alrowwad.org))** is a non-profit organization established in the Aida Refugee Camp, Bethlehem in 1998. It is 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."

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## Reflections by Rev. Canon Dr. Dawna Wall, Victoria B.C.

### **Chicken Church**

East of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives overlooks the old city. A tear shaped building weeps over a landscape where the tombs of the prophets have been buried for at least three thousand years. The Church of Dominus Flevit (Latin for *The Lord Wept*) has a courtyard that frames the layered and complex beauty of the ancient city. The iron grate window over the altar looks out on the golden dome of Temple Mount and beneath the altar, a mosaic of a hen gathering her chicks under her wings reminds us of the words Jesus spoke when looking out over the city as he stood in that place contemplating the horrors that had been and were to come.

Barbed wire is attached to the balcony overlooking a drop off, a reminder of the crown of thorns and the fox, Herod, who brought about death and destruction for the sake of power and control.

Jesus' use of a feminine image for God creates a surprising contrast to the harsh reality and landscape that surrounds him. The juxtaposition of a comforting, loving mother scooting her children toward safety is poignant as Jesus' despair and agony is poured out in his tears and his anguished prayers. In that space his frustration at not being able to bring peace to the people, to a place he cherishes is palpable. We



know that frustration, that fear, that sense of helplessness – those times and places in our lives and world when we are unable to gather up God’s people, God’s creation, and hold them in safety.

Like Jesus, we look at the suffering in Jerusalem and around the world, the inability of God’s beloved children to live and work together peaceably and we too, weep. Our tears join his, in watering a desolate landscape of unending division, poverty, uneven power structures and generational trauma that has embedded itself into the DNA of the people and the land. We weep for Jesus. We weep with Jesus. We weep for God’s beloved children. God’s beautiful creation. And somehow, God is able to take those tears and continue to work in and through us for a renewal we cannot imagine but for which we continue to pray.

### **Morning in the Market**

One morning, I step through the Jaffa gate and into the old city of Jerusalem. I order coffee and sit quietly, reflecting on the power of pilgrimage and pausing to absorb some of the swirling realities that surround me.

I have chosen to be alone this morning because I want the city to be my only companion. I want to taste its air, hear its sounds, watch its people, delight in the subtle golden colour of its walls and gates. I want to be swept up into the symphony that is Jerusalem.

Here, mingling languages, vividly contrasting cultures, costly histories, deeply held religions, and fierce political realities form a symphony of human experience uniquely rich with songs of harsh lament, melodies of sweetest comfort, wild and passionate celebrations of joy, all of them woven together in wonderful and frightening ways. Moments of resolution are rare and fleeting.

Near where I sit, two juxtaposed shopping areas form disparate, interwoven worlds. Just down the stairs near the Jaffa Gate, is a pristine, expensive Israeli shopping mall. Well-dressed shoppers move with an aura of carefully maintained privacy. Here the prices are set, the salespeople quietly and unobtrusively present. Security monitoring systems are everywhere. Echoes of terror, exile and holocaust seem to reverberate from cement blockades. The sterile environment of white, beige and tan is strangely muted.

Mere steps away, the Old City Market is a whole other reality. Personal privacy gives way to communality, silence to cacophony, muted shades to vividly coloured textiles tumbling overtop one another. The smells of olives, spices, and baking bread are everywhere. Undulating languages shout to one another and to me. Smiling faces seek to engage, inviting me to barter and bargain, desperate to make a sale.

Pilgrims from around the world weave their way through the market, the shops and their owners a living backdrop to the ancient stories of their faith traditions. The Jewish, Muslim, Armenian and Christian quarters of the Old City meet and overlap as crowds move in and out of the space. The whole experience unpredictable, noisy, interactive, yet mysteriously, a kind of background music that is also prayer.

Moving through these markets I hear these counterpoint melodies, stretching me as I listen keenly, trying to capture the song at the heart of it all even for a moment. This is Jerusalem, where diametrically opposed people and cultures hold sacred truths in common and whose very calls to prayer overlap and enhance one another.

As a mother, I try to hold in balance the needs, gifts and voices of my daughters through their different ages and stages of life and growth. I seek to nurture and encourage their creative expressions, temper their anger, calm their fears and foster their joy. Moving through Jerusalem, I ponder how a geographic space can allow a motherland to embrace all of her children, their songs and prayers, hopes and dreams. A mother also knows how tangled up they can get.

In its marvellous diversity, I see Jerusalem dancing with all her children, a golden reality that simultaneously breaks and heals our hearts and invites us to keep listening for the mingled melodies of life, death, and resurrection that compose our individual and communal melodies.

### **Nicodemus and me**

I came to Jerusalem by night. Like Nicodemus, I pondered my God questions by the light of the moon and prayed that I might meet Jesus and share conversations, doubts and dreams. I was travelling by myself, setting aside the familiar and well-loved hats of wife, mother and priest and embarking on a pilgrimage with others on a similar journey.

Just after midnight, I stepped out of the Tel Aviv airport and into a *sharut* (shared taxi) for the journey to Jerusalem. Having navigated that first hurdle, I took a deep breath, settled into a seat next to the window, where exhaustion and excitement found expression in annoyingly persistent tears. I tried to sniff quietly and calm myself, to no avail.

A young Indian woman, returning to university after spring break, sat down next to me. After settling into her spot, she gently placed her sari-covered shoulder next to mine and left it there. The presence of an unknown sister comforted me for the whole of the hour-long journey. Her silent companionship helped me breathe more deeply and regain my sense of self. As we wove our way through the city, I marveled at the bustle and activity of Jerusalem at night. As my destination was called, I stepped out of the van, turned to claim my suitcase and glanced at the

window where I had been sitting. I saw the beautiful brown eyes of my seatmate looking at me with deep kindness. She lifted her hand and placed it on the window. I placed mine there, too, and felt her blessing linger as the *sharut* moved off into the night.

Two weeks later, I arranged for another *sharut* to pick me up for my midnight flight home. I was nervous, and checked and double checked with the front desk about the time and the location and how I would recognize my ride at a busy intersection. The desk-clerk assured me that it was very straightforward.

While I had come to love Jerusalem and longed to spend more time within her walls, I was also aware of the darkness and danger that lurked in shadows. I asked two of my fellow pilgrims to walk with me to my meeting point, and they agreed with gracious generosity. It turned a frightening moment into a shared adventure. The traffic was heavy and the meeting place less than obvious. My sisters in faith shared my wide-eyed confusion with laughter and helped me figure out which crosswalk to dash across. We waited and watched and approached a few cabs as a backup plan, but finally, like the Knight Bus in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, my *sharut* came shimmying around the corner and stopped with a jerk. My friends hugged me and waved goodbye as I moved to a window seat and placed my hand on the window. So many conversations, doubts and dreams danced in the light of the moon, and I found my spirit had been reborn.