

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



The Revised Common Lectionary—Year B

# Readings

Acts 1: 15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5: 9-13; John 17: 6-19

## Context & Sermon Notes

### *The Materiality of Our Faith (2021)*

*Context and Notes Prepared by Patricia G. Kirkpatrick and John Chapman*

It is no less a scholar than Walter Brueggemann who reminds us that for too long now the church's emphasis has been on the spiritual aspects of our faith and as a consequence our gaze on the materiality of our faith has received too little attention. It has created a disconnect between our personal piety and how that is translated into our everyday engagements with our individual contexts.

Listening to the story of Ascension, from the Gospel of Luke (or in set readings for this Sunday words attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John), Jesus' concern is that the disciples understand they are to remain on earth in order to continue the work of God in the proclaiming of the kingdom.

The focus is on the worldly not on the spiritual realms of the heavenly chorus. Our focus ought not to be on a piece of heavenly real estate where now resides the Christ, rather our gaze must be focused on the work of discipleship and the incarnating in our own lives the values of the kingdom of God.

In faithfully serving the kingdom you will grow. "You will", he assures them, "receive power". Because what is true of the disciples, their incomprehension, their all too obvious humanity, is also true of us and will until the end of time be true of all who follow Christ as Risen Lord.

Jerusalem Sunday is about the materiality of our faith.

Our gaze trembles before God and yet we are made bold because of the ministry of His Son and the continued working of the Holy Spirit in our individual lives and communities.

In many ways for those of you who choose to celebrate Ascension Thursday on this same Sunday it is most apt that our focus should be on the materiality of our faith as opposed to the spirituality of our faith.

As we ponder what this means in our lives there is a sense in which the where of the happening of these words is non-essential. Except for one very important aspect, these are not metaphysical contemplations. These are words spoken in time by a person of a particular place, namely Jesus of Nazareth who died near Jerusalem and was seen for the first time in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem Sunday is but one of the many ways in which we can be mindful of our propensity to speak of the other worldly dimensions of our faith and forgo the difficult dialogue with the earthly manifestations of our faith.

Jerusalem Sunday provides a rare moment when we can gaze on this very material aspect of faith namely discipleship and from within the Canadian church ask particularly how it is that our companionship with the people of the diocese of Jerusalem informs our faith. Not simply the historical aspects of that faith but also the ongoing acts of our faith.

This Sunday more than at any other time in the year we are being asked by the Canadian Companions of Jerusalem to think seriously of the church of the Episcopal diocese of Jerusalem whose mandate extends to all of Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. To remember that these are places where Christians are threatened not only in terms of their livelihood but also their physical well being.

We are asked to remember this place particularly not because it is holier than any other but because our faith tradition is grounded in events of time and space.

There is a need in every age for the church through her invocation of Jesus as Lord, to challenge the systems that dehumanize people and to remind the authorities of what their duty actually is. What are these duties and do we recognize these in our own contexts? As well as elsewhere?

The message of Acts, as with the message of the Ascension, is that the church, in the power of the Spirit, will be called to bear witness to Jesus Christ precisely at the places where society and governments are drifting away from the good which God intends for the created order.

It is precisely at these places that things begin to get 'messy' as we, you and I discern the will of the Spirit in accordance with Scripture, tradition and the church. It is the expectation that as disciples this is precisely what it is that we are to do in all parts of our lives.

Jerusalem Sunday is also about the fact that none of these things are we asked to do on our own. But here too it gets 'messy'. It is clear in the readings either for Ascension Day or the Sunday after when we celebrate Jerusalem Sunday that we are to seek out not only the Spirit but also those with whom we can walk side by side yes in solidarity but moreover as companions, continuously growing in our companionship.

This Sunday is a time to ask what we understand by the word companion and companionship. To be sure there are now resources at our disposal whereby we may access the diocese of Jerusalem via internet portals and see all of the works presently happening in that Diocese but this is still not companionship.

'Besides what is so special about Jerusalem?' I hear you ask. Again, it gets messy. One thing is for sure and that is that if we wander too far from the path of our historical roots we may cease to understand the calling of the spirit today. Our historical roots are those to be sure of the earthly Jerusalem, the centre of a Diocese which includes the territories of Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Israel and the West Bank. A place of conflict as well as peace, a place of diverse religious expressions as well as interfaith dialogue, a place of incomprehensible need in terms of displaced peoples and yet a place of overwhelming hospitality.

The Advisory Council of the Canadian Companions of Jerusalem was first established by General Synod in 2011 and as part of its mandate asked to establish a Sunday which would be devoted to the reflecting on our companionship with the Diocese of Jerusalem. We have done so for but 7 years.

It is a moment in the liturgical calendar when we can

- pause and learn of those in Jerusalem with whom as a national Church we walk in Companionship
- pause and reflect on the materiality of our faith's history
- pause and reflect on how Jerusalem herself stands at the crossroads of three religious traditions with whom we are in dialogue
- pause and reflect how Jesus bids us become implicated in the materiality of Kingdom values.

The materiality of our history, the materiality of our relationships within our church communities and the materiality of the companionships we strike up with those in Jerusalem are the focus of this Jerusalem Sunday.

## Reading Notes

### *Easter VII Reading Notes: John 17:6-19*

#### Kosmos in John 17

Following Louw and Nida the four principal meanings of kosmos in John are:

- 1) universe
- 2) earth
- 3) world system
- 4) people

It is interesting to follow the use of the term Kosmos in the Gospel of John. The term indicates just how close our author comes to a dualistic world view. Jesus's disciples are told that they do not belong to this 'world' even though he is sending them into the world in the way that he too was sent. It is tempting to see here a dualism of Spirit and matter in the sense of making a distinction between the physical and material order and that of the Spirit.

In John generally and here particularly is the proclamation that Jesus came to reveal a different order of life which others have conspired against; a world system hostile to the values of the Kingdom and therefore the reign of God which constitute the 'world' in John. Even so it is not rejected but rather is the sphere in which the disciples are called to operate.

We can, of course, confront the 'worldly' powers on our own. Yet, it is always better to do so with companions along the way. Today on Jerusalem Sunday, we are grateful that we walk together with our friends in the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem as we confront the ways in which truth must speak to power both at home and abroad. We walk as companions seeking peace with justice both for Jerusalem and the faithful here in Canada. We are not of another realm nor are we to seek out a spiritual realm. Here in John we can be reassured that by service to kingdom values we are indeed doing the work of the Spirit. *Indeed, that's what most of the bible is about: how God is acting in the world and how God's people should act with their Creator.*

*(Jim Wallis in Materiality as Resistance: Five Elements for Moral Action in the Real World. Brueggemann, W. 2020)*



Anglican Church of Canada

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