

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

A few years ago, the Anglican Church of Canada made the decision to celebrate Jerusalem Sunday on the 7th Sunday of Easter – that always falling on the Sunday after the Ascension and one week before Pentecost. This is not an accident, nor is it simply a convenient time in the Church year to ‘stick’ in this celebration. It is actually the most theologically rich and appropriate day to think about, pray for and celebrate Jerusalem.

However, when we celebrate Jerusalem Sunday, it is important that we recognize what it is and what it is not that we are upholding and honouring. First of all, we are not simply praying for the city that some members of our congregation have visited and a few others would like to visit. It is not the Jerusalem of the newspapers that we are celebrating. Quite to the contrary, we are celebrating something, a Jerusalem, that is not yet ... While we are certainly praying for the Christians, Jews and Muslims who co-exist in the Jerusalem of today, it is the City of God that we look to metaphorically, that we are praying for and honouring as we worship this day.

I invite you to think about the role that Jerusalem has played in the evolution of our world, in the very societies that we have come from. Prior to World War II, Jerusalem was just a place on a map that was not yet the understood home of all native Jewish peoples, and to be argued by some, the home of all Jewish peoples, period. It was a city of great history that was situated in a land that was transferred from power to power as nations prevailed over other nations. The sense of Jerusalem as “home” to the Jewish and Christian faiths was not nearly as prevalent as it is understood to be since Israel was created. Since 1948 there has grown an almost mythic understanding of the importance of Jerusalem around the world, and in particular, for some sects of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. It seems that when the self-named “super powers” deemed Jerusalem and Israel to be of the utmost importance, that there was a significant shift in thinking about Jerusalem as a city of this world - a shift away from the traditional understanding of Jerusalem as a city of God’s world.

It is nigh impossible for us, gathered here in the Western World in a Christian Church, to listen to scripture speaking about Zion and Jerusalem and not automatically imagine in our minds the Western Wall, the Dome of the Rock, the hill that people have named as Calvary. Our conditioning as a people, churchd or not, leads us to imagine a particular place with a specific history and a very tempestuous present-day environment. Our reality very much informs, and maybe even dictates, how we consider Jerusalem when we celebrate this day as Jerusalem Sunday.

Another consideration we need to hold in mind as we contemplate Jerusalem on this day, is the power this geographical location holds for those who desire to hold the power. While it seems to be a mantra of the Western World that religion and politics shouldn’t mix, mingle or even share a table, there is a lot of theological sway that is applied when the Jerusalem of today is considered.

There are many Christians, many of them who are very wealthy and exercise a great deal of influence, who are of the theological mindset that the new world order, the second coming of Christ, can only happen when certain and very specific things and events fall into place in Jerusalem. If we give it some thought for just a moment we realize that there is no oil, no endangered and specific resource in Jerusalem that must be exported. There is a lack of natural

resources for things which the civilized world craves coming out of Israel. So, in a world that is so hungry for oil and clean water, trade routes and mineral deposits, why is Israel, with Jerusalem smack dab at its heart, such a hotly contested and protected place?

That question is one which we will leave to the political scientists and politicians of the world. This morning we need to do the work of acknowledging why we, as Christians gathered here, half way around the world, would want, or more importantly, *need*, to pray for Jerusalem.

Our relationship with Jerusalem is one of eschatology – that being the part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final destiny of the soul and of humankind. When we think about and discuss Jerusalem in any depth, we are really searching into our hearts and minds for that sense of who we are in relation to God and Jesus Christ and what we believe about the tomorrow that comes after our mortal life.

When we think on Jerusalem; as we sing hymns that call upon her beauty; as we offer prayers and ask God to deliver us into glory with that City of Light, we are reaching beyond our temporal lives and yearning for that heavenly place in which, not only will we have found that true and everlasting peace that passes all understanding, but so will all of creation. When we ponder heaven, it is not a personal and individual thing we should be thinking on but rather that moment in eternity when all of God's creation, including humanity, will be wrapped up in the glory of God's creative intention come to pass.

Whether we realize it or not, everything we do when we gather as 2 or 3, or 22 or 32 in Christ's name, we are preparing for that moment when Jerusalem – the Jerusalem that God is intending – shall come to pass. When we face the east to recite the Nicene or Apostles' Creed, we are looking not to the Jerusalem of today's Israel, but we are figuratively looking toward the fulfillment of God's will in the New Jerusalem.

When we pray "thy will be done" we are not simply asking that God give us something we have asked for in prayer. We are praying the most powerful and beautiful prayer that could be uttered – as we invite God to complete what God has started, allowing at long last that God's intention become reality – thy *will* be done.

The Jerusalem we pray for does, of course, include the Jerusalem of today – for its peace, for stability, for harmony among all the peoples that call it home, both literally and spiritually. But we are also, at one and the same time, praying for that which should indeed give us pause but which we should look forward with great hope to nonetheless – the coming of the New Jerusalem. But we pray for this coming not in a way that suggests we want the Apocalypse and the destruction of all that is not "good" but rather we pray for that time when God's peace and harmony, good will and fulfillment for God's creation might come to pass through Jesus Christ.

I mentioned when I began, that this Sunday, right in the middle of the time between Jesus' Ascension to heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, is the perfect Sunday to celebrate Jerusalem Sunday. This is the perfect day because it is a time in which we sit in wonder, with the disciples and followers of Jesus as they waited for a time they knew not when it would come, nor did they know what would happen when that time arrived.

The Ascension happened, and it was a glorious thing because it was the fulfillment of Jesus' earthly ministry and the sharing of that truth that from heaven Jesus came and to heaven he returned. But it was also the beginning of a time of waiting and anticipation, as the disciples and all the followers of Jesus waited, wondering and imagining what might happen next. They

believed in all Jesus had told them and they held firm, trusting that what would come would be both beautiful and worth the wait, but wait they must ...

As we gather here on a beautiful Sunday in May, 2000 years after when those first believers hoped Jesus would return, we too wait. Each and every time we join together at the altar to receive the body and blood of Christ, we are participating in active waiting. When we taste the bread and wine, we are tasting a foretaste of that New Jerusalem where we will no longer need to receive Communion – the body and blood of Christ – because we will be in Communion with Jesus Christ himself, as we live in eternity with him in the New Jerusalem.

This day, as we celebrate and pray for Jerusalem, let us all both remember and look toward that day when we will join together with all of humanity in that New Jerusalem – in that fulfillment and culmination of God's will – in God's creation complete.

I would like to close with a poem, written by Saul Chernikovsky, translated by Maurice Samuel and revised by my Old Testament professor from seminary, Dr. Gordon Hamilton. It is a "creed" that speaks of the Jewish blessing and hope that is shared when people gather together and celebrate that God's work will indeed be done, as they look forward to that fulfillment, saying "Next year in Jerusalem!"

I invite you to take a look at the picture that is on the chancel steps when you come forward for communion. It says, in Hebrew, *la-sha-NAH ha-ba-A bee-roo-sha-LAY-im! Next year in Jerusalem!*

*Laugh at all my dreams, my dearest, Laugh and I repeat anew
That I still believe in humanity as I still believe in you;
That I still believe in humanity as I still believe in you.*

*By the passion of our spirit shall our ancient bonds be shed.
Let the soul be given freedom, let the body have its bread!
Let the soul be given freedom, let the body have its bread!*

*For my soul is not yet sold to the golden calf of scorn;
For I still believe in humanity, and the spirit within us born.
For I still believe in humanity, and the spirit within us born.*

*Life and love and strength and action in our heart and blood shall beat,
And our hopes shall be both heaven and the earth beneath our feet.
And our hopes shall be both heaven and the earth beneath our feet.*

And now, I invite you to repeat after me as we pray:

**La-sha-NAH
Ha-ba-A
Bee-roo-sha-LAY-im! Amein.**

Next year in Jerusalem! Amen.