

Jerusalem Sunday – 7<sup>th</sup> of Easter – 13 May 2018  
Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; John 17:6-19

This morning we are celebrating the Sunday after Ascension, but we are also commemorating “Jerusalem Sunday” within the Anglican Church of Canada. Our National Church has had a longstanding relationship with the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem, and for many Anglicans there is such a strong connection – emotionally and faithfully – that many Canadian Anglicans consider a trip to the Holy Land as one of those bucket list items they would like to do at least once in their lifetime. I am no different. I would love to go to Jerusalem some day to discover where my faith was founded and to immerse myself in the history of what I hold so dearly as I consider my eternal future.

As a Church we are asked to take time every year, on this particular Sunday, to pray for Jerusalem and in particular the ministries of the Anglican Church in that Diocese. We have been asked to take time to think about what it is we think of when we refer to Jerusalem, both geographically in this world, but also, when we think about our faith. Jerusalem is, in many ways, the physical touchstone of our faith. Christianity began in Jerusalem with the death and resurrection of Jesus and it is in Jerusalem that we are told in scripture that Christ will come again. No matter how literally or metaphorically we understand the Bible, and all that we have been taught, Jerusalem holds a special place in the lives of Christians and it is appropriate that we would take time to pray and uphold the Christians, and all other peoples of that historically and theologically rich city.

At the 2013 General Synod of the Canadian Church, a resolution was passed on peace and justice in Palestine and Israel, which commits Canadian Anglicans to educate themselves more deeply about the issue, to explore and challenge theories and beliefs such as Christian Zionism, anti-Semitism, theories denying the right of Israel to exist, Islamophobia and anti-Arab sentiments. This Jerusalem Sunday is simply a beginning; a way to open our minds to the greater issues that are calling upon us for prayer and consideration. And so, today, we are intentionally thinking of, and praying for, the Diocese of Jerusalem and all the people in that city – Christian and non-Christian alike.

Our Scripture this morning takes place in and around Jerusalem and it centers us on the Gospel and what we are all called to do. We heard first the lesson from the Acts of the Apostles the story that has happened just after the Ascension, when weeks after having risen from the dead and spending time helping the disciples understand their new role as apostles, Jesus ascends to heaven, having promised his faithful followers that the Holy Spirit would descend upon them and bring them wisdom, comfort and guidance. The disciples, now without Jesus right beside them, are trying to establish who is being called to do this work that the Ascending Christ has commissioned them to do.

Just before this passage that we listened to this morning, Jesus was saying his farewells to the disciples, and they asked him if now is the time when he will restore the kingdom to Israel. After all that Jesus has been teaching them, they are still wrapped up in their old assumptions that the kingdom of God on earth will be a restored and powerful Jerusalem – Israel of old made new again. They were still struggling to understand that the kingdom will not be one of personal power and conquering nationhood. It will be a kingdom of peace and hope in which there are no

orphans or widows but rather a community that reaches out to all in God's name through Jesus Christ. While Jesus could probably have been righteously indignant, and indeed perturbed, that they still didn't get it, he instead promised them that the Father would send one who would help them get it. What they don't understand – can't yet understand – will come to them yet, through the guidance of the coming Holy Spirit.

This passage from Acts can be a little confusing because in the Gospel we heard Jesus praying to God and saying that he has taught them everything that God wanted them to know. Jesus seems to be saying that they get it; the disciples understand his words and are ready for what will come next. And yet, weeks later, at the time of the Ascension and at the choosing of the new 12<sup>th</sup> disciple, we hear that same group of people, whom we think have it all figured out, based on what Jesus prayed at the Last Supper, still not understanding. They are still struggling to figure out what Jesus' ministry was about both pre and post resurrection. And then they add to their numbers Mathias, who was not part of the group that was personally trained and prepared by Jesus himself.

Did Jesus just overestimate what the disciples had comprehended when he prayed to God and said that they have received God's words and know in truth that Jesus had come from God? Or was Jesus doing something a little different there, at the Last Supper, when he was praying, one on one, with God?

I think that Jesus was having a conversation – a prayer – with God in a way that too few of us understand prayer to be. Prayer can be a time of listening and discerning; a time of asking and inquiring; but if the pray-er is totally in tune with God's voice, then the prayer being spoken may just take on a different tone. The prayer offered by one who is totally in sync with God, to whom he is praying, will be one of complete peace and understanding, and maybe even one of complete acceptance and expectation.

When Jesus prayed to God, he did so in the present tense. He prayed as if all those things that God had promised and for which Jesus had been working, were already being fulfilled, right then, in that moment. Jesus prayed in complete acceptance and expectation that what God wanted to happen would happen, had indeed already happened.

Think about it for just a minute. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray that God's will be done – period. When we are able to turn everything over to God and pray in peace and faith, we say "God, your will be done." We don't say "a week from now or tomorrow". We don't say maybe His will *will* be done. We pray in the now, in the present tense, that God's will be done.

What is it that signifies the difference between our prayers being actual prayers and not just wishes that we send heavenward just in case God might be listening? The difference is that with wishes we hope what we are asking for might happen, and with prayers we trust that what we ask for is happening now. And within those two very different things, lies the greatest difference of all – that of our honest intention. A wish sent heavenward is a personal desire we have for ourselves, or from our own imaginings of how things should be. A prayer offered to God is not a request but a thanksgiving that God is, right now, working out how things are to be according to God's will and design.

Can we thwart God's design; His answer to our prayers? Yes, indeed we can, by ignoring God's will and acting on our own wishes instead. But if we are patient and await the answer or

the incarnation of the answer to our prayers that God offers, we will find that God's will is always so much better than anything we could wish for ourselves.

Unlike many of what we consider to be prayers, Jesus' prayer was one that was truly prayer. He was praying a fact - that God would work in the disciples and it would be truth that they understood all that Jesus had been telling them. Jesus' prayer was answered, in due time. His was not a wish sent to God, but rather an articulated prayer that stated what God had already set into motion. The disciples simply had to catch up with that prayer. They were called upon to respond to God even if, in that moment, they couldn't quite comprehend God.

There is a quote that Joan Chitister of the Order of St. Benedict uses: "If you expect to see the final results of your work, you have simply not asked a big enough question."

When we pray, I think that all too often, we don't pray big enough. We pray only for what we can picture in our minds; what we think we can accomplish on our own. What would happen if we, as a whole community, as a whole Christian Church around the world, simply prayed as Jesus did - praying that God's will - all of it - simply be done? That is a prayer that is too large to wrap our heads around; our imaginations could never be big enough to picture the end result of that prayer - but isn't that the point of prayer? Aren't we supposed to be placing everything in God's hands and then simply working, in our own small way, toward exactly what we have been praying for, even though the outcome is beyond our comprehension?

As we gather on this "Jerusalem Sunday" and as we pray for peace in that holiest of land, it can seem so overwhelming that we are called on to pray for that which has not happened in millennia - peace in the Middle East; brotherhood instead of war. But it shouldn't be overwhelming because we believe in the power of God working in the world, and we know that God chooses to work through us.

Our prayers should not be couched in "maybe's and if it could ever possibly be's". Our prayers should, like Jesus' prayer, be statements of fact - that peace will be in Jerusalem; that hope will come from God to all the peoples of that land; that the Gospel message of forgiveness and eternal life will be shared and experienced by all of God's people.

God isn't asking us for advice on how to make all that happen. He is simply expecting us to pray for it to happen and then respond when he calls upon us to act.

In the words of Albert Schweitzer:

*He comes to us as One unknown,*

*As of old he came by the lakeside*

*To those who knew him not.*

*He speaks to us ...*

*He commands ...*

*And those who obey ...*

*Shall learn in their own experience who he is.*

You and I are simply called to obey, and our obedience is simply shown through prayer. When we pray for God's will, our prayer will be heard and answered. When we pray for God's peace,

we must trust that peace is in process and it is coming. If we do not believe what we pray, then our prayers are not prayers at all, but only wishes.

We are not called to wish for what might be ... We are called to pray for what God says *will* be. And so, we pray for peace – for ourselves; for our communities; for our world; and for Jerusalem. And we pray believing that our prayer is being answered, even as we pray.