

2nd April 2006 Lent Five B  
Rob Lamerton

Readings:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 119:9-16 page 350

Hebrews 5:5-15

John 12:20-33

In one month the Lamertons will be winging our way to the UK! But first there are some things to do! There is Easter of course! Even before that my mother Josie Lamerton is visiting this week and our wandering son John will be home the following week to overlap with my mothers visit.

As well as all that the new Parish Council will begin meeting this week!

I look forward to some of the wonderful places and people we will see in the UK. I imagine when we get there if we find we cannot see and do the things we hope for then we will be pretty frustrated. "Sorry you cannot go to the Jane Austen museum it's closed!" or "You will only be able to look at Durham cathedral because of repairs!"

I wonder if that was the experience of those Greeks in the gospel story today? You have heard of "Eco tourists". Well the Greeks in Jesus day had a reputation as Education Tourists!

Greeks were evidently the "Education Tourists" of the time of Jesus in the ancient world. Of course they were spread all around the Mediterranean because of the conquest of Philip and Alexander the Great some three hundred years before. But they were known for their wandering and searching out of new ideas and religious thought. They were seekers after truth and travelled through philosophy after philosophy. So it was not surprising to find Greeks in Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover.

These Greeks may have been just travellers or they may have been proselytes. Proselytes in Jesus day were "converts". Of course the biggest issue for a "Convert" was circumcision! Therefore many chose to embrace the monotheistic faith and ethic of the Jews, and who even admired and observed some of the customs such as Sabbath rest, other Sabbath customs, food laws and giving to charity. They visited synagogues, listened to the reading and expounding of the Scriptures in Greek. Although drawing near to Judaism they were NOT full Jews. Their descendents may have gone on to become full Jews but they continued in an intermediate state between pagans and Jews, chiefly because of the requirement of circumcision.

And these men may have been proselytes — gentiles training in the Jewish faith and tradition but we do not know! But they appear to be searching and may well have come to experience the festival and the Temple having heard of its greatness.

The temple was the ultimate symbol of God's presence and the

place where the priests offered sacrifice and prayer on behalf of the people of Israel.

We also need to understand the grandness and the scale of this temple. And it is hardly just a place of worship! The temple built by Herod was essentially a symbol of power. In spite of all that the Jewish people believed about it as a place of religious importance of sacrifice and prayer it really was a symbol of power! The political power and authority of Herod, and of the power of the religious elite the Chief Priests.

The historian Josephus writing in his "Antiquities" in about AD 95 tells us much about the temple before it was destroyed

The outer W side of the temple are had four gates. The first gate (probably in the centre) led to the royal palace by a bridge over the Tyropoeon Valley. Two more (probably to the N) led to the suburbs; the last (most southerly) led into the city by a long flight of steps down into the valley and another long flight up again. The S side had gates (probably two), and a great portico, called the Royal Portico, with a triple ambulatory (walkway) as contrasted with a double ambulatory on the other sides. The valley below this portico was so deep that looking over into it caused giddiness! This is the "pinnacle" of the temple of Matt. 4:5; Luke 4.9. There were four rows of columns, the fourth being engaged with the S wall. Each column was 27 feet high and so thick that three men with outstretched arms were required to embrace it. The total number of columns was 162, their capitals being of the Corinthian order. The two outer walkways were 30 feet wide, the middle one half again as wide., their length was a stade (about 200 yards or 180 metres). The total height of the outside walkways was over 15 metres (50 feet), but the height of the middle one was much greater, the roof being raised in the centre.

Inside this first enclosure, or outer court ("Court of the Gentiles"), was a smaller enclosure, to be reached by a few ascending steps. This inner enclosure was surrounded by a low stone wall (or balustrade) on which was an inscription (or inscriptions) warning foreigners to go no farther, on pain of death. The enclosure itself had three equidistant gates on the N side and three on the S. On the E there was one large gate where Jews might enter with their wives, since the area within this gate was the Women's Court. Beyond this was an area into which the women could not go ("Court of Israel"). Still closer to the temple proper, and immediately surrounding it, was the court which only the priests could enter ("Priests' Court"). Within all was the temple building itself, with an altar of burnt offering in front. These courts and enclosures required eight years to build (XV.xi.6).

Where did these Greeks stand in all of this? Even if they were proselytes they would NOT have had full admission to the temple. They saw those warning signs telling them that they could not enter the temple under pain of death!

And I'm sure they felt very welcome!!!

It is interesting to me that people still ask "are we allowed to go into the church?" as if they have to pass a test. I suppose if we had a sign saying "Death to all un-baptized people who enter" that might tell us how those Greeks felt!

Anglican Church buildings are not public buildings like say the ACT Assembly. Legally they belong to The Anglican Church Property Trust and are managed by the Parish Authorities but they are available to ALL PEOPLE for prayer and worship. The services of the Church ARE NOT Private they are services of public worship.

I recall the words of Jesus, "My house shall be a house of prayer for ALL nations"

This reading, points to the purpose for Jesus arrival! He has come to ask those who were supposed to mediate between God and people the difficult questions about the accessibility of God and about how this temple was a house of prayer for all nations!

The Greeks who want to "see Jesus" may well have wanted to do so because they were confused about lack of access to the God worshipped in this temple.

Their question leads us into the clarification of Jesus mission and purpose!

Jesus answered them,  
'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,  
it remains just a single grain;  
but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Those who love their life lose it,  
and those who hate their life in this world  
will keep it for eternal life.

Whoever serves me must follow me,  
and where I am, there will my servant be also.  
Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

'Now my soul is troubled.  
And what should I say — "Father, save me from this hour"?'  
No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.

Then a voice came from heaven,  
'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'

'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.  
Now is the judgement of this world;  
now the ruler of this world will be driven out.  
And I, when I am lifted up from the earth,  
will draw all people to myself.'  
He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

The Greeks do not really get an answer! They can have access to God in this Temple under pain of death! BUT! They can have access to God if they take up the model Jesus offers.

The grain dies to bear fruit  
Those who hold on to everything will not discover life.  
Service is also the path to God

We cannot escape struggle

But God's judgement will come

The mention of Melchizedek in the Letter to the Hebrews in a number of places is his only appearance in the NT. The major theme of Hebrews is the pre-eminence of Christ and his priesthood and sacrifice — his role as mediator. Melchizedek is offered as part of the scriptural "proof" as Christ is "high priest after the order of Melchizedek".

The stories all point to a new priesthood established in Christ through his death.

Yes the Greeks and everyone else will have access to God through this priesthood but only when a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies so that it may bear much fruit and as Christ is lifted up.