

St. Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor
Third Sunday in Lent — 11 March 2007-03-11
Revd Rob Lamerton

Isaiah 55.1-9; Psalm 63.1-9; 1 Corinthians 10.1-13; Luke.31-35

For federal politicians this election year, the prize is a seat in the House of Representatives or the Senate here in Canberra. They go through all the procedures of party endorsement and election campaigns. Canberra is the object of their attention — or rather the opportunity to influence, or even create, government policy and to represent those who elect them.

In our gospel story today, Jesus' eye is firmly fixed on Jerusalem! Jerusalem, the centre of attention for Jews for over a thousand years even by the time of Jesus, was also the centre of religious activity and government authority.

It symbolised God's presence among them and the care of God for the children of Israel. It was the centre of priesthood, worship, pilgrimage, and sacrifice. Jerusalem is still the holiest place for Jews today, but it is also holy to Christians and Muslims.

The tradition of Jerusalem goes back as far as Abraham. It was the place where David established his kingdom and Solomon built the first temple. It was the place to which the exiles had returned. Jerusalem was also the place of the second temple under Ezra and Nehemiah.

In fact that was the story of the Isaiah passage today, which is a welcome to a renewed and restored Jerusalem — a place of life, of plenty, of abundance of God's blessings. It is the place where people meet God. It is a place of repentance and the restoration of God's mercy and pardon. It is a place where people ponder the wonder and otherness of God.

Jerusalem has also been a place of humiliation and defeat and exclusion, from Roman times until the early 1900s. It has remained a focus and hope for Jews dispersed around the world. Its rebuilding is a symbol of modern Israel's national life. Jews pray in the direction of Jerusalem and the Passover recalls the hope of celebrating Passover in Jerusalem.

But of course Jerusalem is also of great importance to Muslims and Christians, partly because of the common aspects of our faiths that go back to David, but also because, for Muslims, it houses the al-Aqsa mosque and, for Christians, it is the focus of Jesus' mission and teaching, his death and resurrection, and the beginnings of a Christian movement.

As such it is a contentious place. The traditional interpretation of the name Jerusalem is "city of peace" but that is not correct. The origins of the name are really quite unclear!

In Jesus day; Jerusalem was the focus of religious and political power, as Canberra is today for Australian politicians, and Jesus knew that it was his mission to call Jerusalem back to God, to gather the people. He did not head to Jerusalem because he wanted to escape Herod.

Rather, Jesus' purpose was much more deliberate and purposeful. Clearly Jesus is on a mission. It is a reminder to us that we share his mission and that we need to have our part in that mission worked out.

Over the past few weeks I have mentioned the vision I have had for a Sunday (or other) evening to “Tell your life story”. I have talked over the coordination of this with Avigail Abarbanel, but as yet, further inspiration has not come.

I had a gathering of Thursday some others (Denise Rhonda and Ann) about a faith-sharing exercise. Out of that came the idea of a home group or groups. There are good ideas flowing, but we need to organise a way to balance out the needs of these two possibilities.

Mission occurs most wonderfully at Pandora’s, and at the Northbourne Community Centre, but these other ideas need to be prayed about, discussed further, and acted upon. I suppose if there is a theme of this second Sunday in Lent, it is the clear sense of Jesus’ mission to the heart of his people’s faith. He was also aware of the danger. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.”

Jesus recognises that his mission will be tough. Even though the city of Jerusalem is the centre of God’s presence and worship it has lost its true godliness. It has lost the vision, so beautifully described by Isaiah, to be a place of renewal and of God’s abundance for all come to it.

Paul sees the parallels between the mission, the journey, of the ancient Hebrews with Moses, and the mission of the Christians of his day. The mission of the ancient peoples was sustained by God in the wilderness. Christ was present, in the food and drink of the wilderness, to sustain God’s people. We too, have Christ with us to nourish strengthen and sustain us in the gifts of bread and wine.

On the mission journey with Christ, we will be sustained. But, like Jesus, we must be willing to share in the mission journey.

Let the politicians continue to seek their place in Parliament.

Our task is to participate in the mission journey, enabled by the ongoing presence of Christ in the gifts of word, prayer and bread and wine.