

Sunday 14th November 2004, Rob Lamerton

Readings:

- Isaiah 65.17-25
- (for the psalm) A Song of Isaiah (page 391)
- 2 Thessalonians 3.6-13
- Luke 21.5-19

10am: Baptism of Jesse Dot White

Welcome to the many who have come for Jesse's baptism.

HOPE

What is it you hope for?

at work — better conditions
a change in attitude

at Home — that you could find more time to relax or
read,
— to socialize

for children — that they grow up healthy
— enjoy friendships
— cherish learning
— be good at sport

OR — that they lead fulfilling, useful lives?

We hope for many things.

Isaiah — hoped that the new temple in Jerusalem would be the focus, the centre of the people of God, in fact, the centre of God, of the new creation...

He had high hopes that the new creation of God would bring great joy, because all people would be directing their attention to God and that this would mean all

kinds of blessings and God's presence would be evident.

Some 540 years later, after it was destroyed and rebuilt, Jesus could see that it was **NOT** the focus of God's presence.

No longer the focus of peace and unity — in fact, it had become a symbol of division; of a faith which excluded; (to what extent has St Philip's?)

and in the dangerous times ahead,

His hope was that his followers would not be deceived
frightened/terrified
silenced

in spite of the persecution they would experience.

He saw clearly the tug of war between **GOOD** and **EVIL**.

GOOD might be found in the strangest places

- amongst traditional enemies; the Romans
- amongst those thought to be without any faith
- *hopefully* among his followers as they realized God's presence.

EVIL might be found among

- fellow believers, fellow Jews in the synagogues,
- among one's own family
- amongst the religious leaders
- amongst government authorities.

Jesus also saw that Good people could be overwhelmed by the Evil, and his hope and prayer was/is that people (**WE**) look to God to sustain and to free us, to help us know the way of the Good through tough times. Paul saw the evils of laziness and selfishness among Christian believers.

[Baptism is about that! As we bring young Jesse Dot here today, we remember that Baptism is **NOT** magic — It is a sacrament of God's love — It is a sign that we pledge ourselves to live and learn the ways of God in the life of Jesus — to help us know the ways of God in a world which seems so often, in spite of all its beauty, to confront us with Evil.]

I think Jesus is saddened by standing and looking at this grand building which symbolized God's presence, because he knows how divisive and unhelpful it has become for his day.

Sadly, the place where three great world religions, Christians, Muslims and Jews, meet, is Jerusalem. The temple which could be a source of unity for them all is not.

We as Christians are tied to it as a place where Jesus himself confronts the **EVIL** of this world.

- religious intolerance
- racial hatred
- political self preservation

His way is the way of love and liberation; of joy and peace with God, and with each other. This is the hope we have and which we are called to embody in our lives. Jesus goes to be the Christ whom we love and celebrate.