

PRAYER FOR AND WITH JERUSALEM

A Sermon for Jerusalem Sunday, May 13, 2018

St. Paul's Cathedral in Kamloops

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“Jerusalem is in many ways the crossroads of the world . . . It’s where civilizations have met and clashed over centuries. It’s the place where the three Abrahamic religions meet. It’s the place, geopolitically, which could ignite the whole world in war. And spiritually, for all Christians, it’s the place where **we all feel we have a connection**, because of [its status as] the land of Jesus’s birth and death and resurrection.

“To be connected to Jerusalem is in a real sense to be connected with the living heart of our Christian faith. At a time when Christians are depopulating in the Middle East, the land of our Lord’s life and death is in the hands of the Diocese of Jerusalem and other partner churches in that area—all of which are facing grave difficulties.”

CONVERNING THOSE DIFFICULTIES

Clare Amos, in her book *Peace-ing Together Jerusalem*, speaks of the “valued and appropriate place that love for Jerusalem holds in Christian theology.” She quotes a statement issued by the 8th World Council of Churches Assembly in Harare in 1998:

We are reminded that this city is central to the faith of Christians. In this city our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, died and rose again. Jerusalem is the place where the gift of the Spirit was given and the church was born. For the writers of the New Testament, Jerusalem

represents the new creation, the life to come and the aspirations of all people, where God will wipe away all tears. (p. 95)

JERUSALEM SUNDAY, THIS YEAR, A FOCUS THIS YEAR ON THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF WOMEN

1) HISTORICALLY AND BIBLICALLY

There is Huldah, prophet of Jerusalem (2 Kings 22:14-20), speaking the truth to King Josiah. This woman is a messenger of God's word. There is the prophet Anna, an elderly woman living in the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer. (Luke 2:36-38) When the child Jesus is brought to the temple, Anna recognizes this special child and speaks of him to "all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem . . . There are the women who follow Jesus right to the end of his earthly life, women whose generosity has financed Jesus' ministry (Luke 8:1-3.)

John Peterson, in his guide to the Stations of the Cross A Walk in Jerusalem, comments on the eighth station, *Jesus Talks to the Weeping Women*. He writes, "Jerusalem has always known pain, and it has always known the tears of women – Armenian women, Jewish women, Palestinian women, Druze women – as they have waited and have watched their husbands, their sons and daughters, their brothers and sisters, go off to the slaughter of war or to the punishment of prisons and detention centres." Women and men light candles and weep for those in prison and distress.

2) WOMEN TODAY

Visitors to the Diocese of Jerusalem are welcomed by the generous hospitality of the women of the diocese . . . to share stories about their lives and to discover what it means to be part of the Christian family. It is

encouraging to meet these “living stones,” the men and women from which the church is built.

3) OTHER SPECIAL INITIATIVES include:

Mothers at The Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre for Disabled Children, established in 1965 as a home and treatment centre for children with physical disabilities. Its vision is that all Palestinian children with disabilities have access to quality health services and inclusive education, can participate and have influence, have hope and opportunities . . . The rehabilitation program is accompanied by a program to empower mothers and families.

Kids4Peace, founded in the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem in 2002 by leaders at St. George’s College and St. George’s Cathedral, Kids4Peace is a global movement of youth and families, dedicated to ending conflict and inspiring hope in divided societies around the world. It operates international summer camps, leadership programs and a six-year, year-round program for more than 500 Palestinian, Israeli and North American youth. |

The Alrowwad Center for Culture and Arts, a non-profit organization established in the Aida Refugee Camp, Bethlehem in 1998. It is committed to teaching young Palestinians “Beautiful Resistance,” helping them feel proud of who they are through music, drama, photography, the arts, and some social services.

These and other initiatives are well summed in the following
AFFIRMATION

We believe in ourselves as women.
We believe we are called by God

To minister to our world.

We acknowledge our creative power.

We choose to extend this power in service

To a world in need.

We promise ourselves

To celebrate the presence of the Holy

Through the affirmation of all people

Affirming the equality of women

Leaving no person unnamed.

A Story, CHICKEN CHURCH, The Rev. Dr. Dawna Wall

East of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives overlooks the old city. A tear shaped building weeps over a landscape where the tombs of the prophets have been buried for at least three thousand years. The Church of Dominus Flevit (Latin for *The Lord Wept*) has a courtyard that frames the layered and complex beauty of the ancient city. The iron grate window over the altar looks out on the golden dome of Temple Mount and beneath the altar, a mosaic of a hen gathering her chicks under her wings reminds us of the words Jesus spoke when looking out over the city as he stood in that place contemplating the horrors that had been and were to come.

Barbed wire is attached to the balcony overlooking a drop off, a reminder of the crown of thorns and the fox, Herod, who brought about death and destruction for the sake of power and control.

Jesus' use of a feminine image for God creates a surprising contrast to the harsh reality and landscape that surrounds him. The juxtaposition of *a comforting, loving mother scooting her children toward safety* is

poignant as *Jesus' despair and agony is poured out in his tears and his anguished prayers*. In that space *his frustration at not being able to bring peace to the people*, to a place he cherishes is palpable. We know that frustration, that fear, that sense of helplessness – those times and places in our lives and world when we are unable to gather up God's people, God's creation, and hold them in safety. Like Jesus, we look at the suffering in Jerusalem and around the world, the inability of God's beloved children to live and work together peaceably and *we too, weep*.

And when (Jesus) drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation." Luke 19:41-44

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Matthew 23:37-39

(Dawna continues) Our tears join his, in watering a desolate landscape of unending division, poverty, uneven power structures and generational trauma that has embedded itself into the DNA of the people and the land. We weep for Jesus. We weep with Jesus. We weep for God's beloved children. God's beautiful creation. And somehow, God is able to take those tears and continue to work in and through us for a renewal we cannot imagine but for which we continue to pray.

FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL - A prayer for Unity . . . (for Jerusalem itself?)

. . . I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

May the unity known between Father and Son, between Christ and ourselves, be now between all faiths, practices, politics and convictions. We pray, not because it can happen anytime soon, but because it should happen now. I conclude with A PRAYER FOR JERUSALEM written by Primate Fred Hiltz (Video at 10 a.m.)

O God. We give thanks that your dear Son has gathered us in the embrace of his redeeming love and sent us to make that love known to the ends of the earth.

We pray your continued blessings on the steadfast witness of the Church in Jerusalem and throughout the Middle East.

Give your deep joy to those who welcome the pilgrims seeking to know this land and its many peoples.

Grace those who proclaim the Gospel.

Guide all who teach a new generation of young people.

Draw near to those who are sick and bless those who tend them.

Sustain the hope in all who long and labour for a just and lasting peace in the land of The Holy One.

And may the companions of Jerusalem be many and faithful.

We pray in the name of our merciful Saviour, Friend, and Brother, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.