



Rev Helen Jacobi

Jerusalem

Acts 2:1-21

John 15: 26-27, 16:4b-15

Year B Pentecost

23 May 2021

Jerusalem should be the most peaceful city on earth. Jerusalem, sacred to people of Jewish faith, the location of the Temple, the heart of Judaism. Jerusalem, sacred to people of Christian faith, the location of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The location of the events of Pentecost. Jerusalem, sacred to people of Moslem faith, the location of the prophet Mohammed's ascension into heaven and the site of the Al Aqsa mosque.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather 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.” (Mt 23:37)

Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. For centuries before him and centuries after him it has been a city which has been fought over. How is it that the best of our religions has not brought peace?

Jerusalem has always been a meeting point of cultures and religions.

In the account of Pentecost in the Book of Acts we are told:

“There were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ... Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Lybia and Cyrene, even Romans, Cretans and Arabs.” (2:5, 9-11).

Pentecost was the Greek name for the Jewish festival, which fell 50 days after Passover, a kind of harvest festival. Pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem for it. And the followers of Jesus, we are told, “were all together in one place.” (2:1)

Then some pretty strange things happen – now, don't get bogged down in wondering what actually happened – was there an actual wind and actual fire? The more important thing to ask is what are we being told in this story? This event is often seen as the beginning of the church – the moment when the followers of Jesus get their mission and identity. So what are the components of this identity?

First there is the noise like a violent wind – it is not gentle – it is loud and intrusive. Wake up it seems to say.

Then tongues of fire; again not gentle; but bright and urgent.

Each person is touched, everyone is marked or chosen by the fire.

No one gets to sit in the back row and hope they won't be noticed.

The followers of Jesus are on fire for their faith.

Then the followers speak. They do not speak the same language, they are not all on the same page; they are not all confined by doctrines and creeds. They speak and are understood. What do they say? We do not know. This amazing mix of peoples and cultures; this diversity (which is such a clichéd word these days I know) this diversity was at the heart of the beginning of our church. The Holy Spirit made it so.

Peter tries to make sense of what is happening for people – he says the prophets spoke about this – so you should recognise it – Joel said there would be wind and fire and young people and old people dreaming together.

For the politically astute listeners in Peter's audience they would have heard him quote the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32) and would have noted that the same passage Peter was quoting also says that God will remove the occupying army from the north of Israel (Joel 3¹). The Romans would not have got that clue, but for the Jewish people of Jerusalem Peter was making a political statement about the occupying army. This is not just a "spiritual" experience; this was the beginning of a revolution.

Jerusalem and its people need another revolution. The terrible events of the last week – the bombing of Gaza and the rocket attacks on Israel are one more tragedy in a countless line of tragedies stretching back hundreds and thousands of years.

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¹ while Joel is probably written around 300s BC its themes are pre exile

One of the triggers for this current crisis is the eviction of Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in east Jerusalem. Also in this neighbourhood is the Anglican Cathedral of St George and St George's College which hosts groups from around the world on pilgrimage and for courses on the biblical sites.

The Diocese of Jerusalem has a brand new bishop installed on May 13, Bishop Hosam Naoum. The bishop has of course called for an end to hostilities and for the international community to assist with working towards peace. He has called for support of the work of the diocese, in particular in Gaza in the work of the Al Ahli Hospital which the diocese runs.²

30 years ago Stephen and I had the privilege of spending a month at St George's College and on our last day after the course was over we were taken to visit Gaza. We kept a diary and it describes our visit that day to places run by the Near East Council of Churches – an antenatal clinic, a vocational training centre, classrooms and language labs. We write of being shocked at the sight of “Beach Camp”, a shanty town of dwellings, one of the UN refugee camps.

And then we got to visit the hospital run by the Diocese.

I wrote “we toured some of the wards, all was calm. The staff talked of army intimidations, beatings, tear gas, even in the hospital. It is a wonder (I said 30 years ago) all they do is throw stones and strike.”

Well 30 years on the hospital is treating victims of this week's bombings which have killed at least 230 Palestinians in Gaza and 12 Israelis in Israel.³

Our NZ Anglican Missions Board has a long established relationship with the hospital and is seeking donations at this time.⁴ This is one small way we can help the often forgotten people of Palestine.

As people of faith, as Pentecost people, the wind, fire and languages call us to be awake and alert, to speak, to listen. To hear the desolation of the people of Gaza, to hear the sorrow of the people of Israel and to call for

² <https://www.j-diocese.org/>

³ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/israel-hamas-reach-cease-fire-halt-gaza-conflict-n1268004>

⁴ <https://angmissions.org.nz/news/emergency-appeal--al-ahli-arab-hospital-gaza>

the peace of Jerusalem to be restored. The only way that will happen is through dialogue and concession, not war.

Reverend Naim Ateek is a Palestinian Anglican priest and in his book Justice, and Only Justice⁵ written way back in 1990, he says

“The door of peace is reached only through the door of justice. Once that door opens, peace lies inside. Where peace is, a meal is prepared; it is the feast of reconciliation ready to be celebrated. There is, however, no entrance except through the door of justice. ...The creation of the State of Israel, after the Holocaust, has rendered some justice to the Jewish people by giving them a home. Although this home was built on the ashes of other peoples’ homes, on their pain and suffering, it has gradually come to be accepted by the Palestinians. It is time now to go further and implement the second ‘justice’, justice to the Palestinians. If this is not done Israel will go on living unjustly. This injustice will be like a worm eating at Israel’ core.”⁶

30 years on Rev Ateek has founded the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem⁷ which works globally to bring about peace in the holiest of cities, Jerusalem.

As with all world crises there is layer upon layer of complexity but as people of faith we are called to try and peel off at least some of the layers and seek to understand. Jerusalem should be the most peaceful city on earth. Jerusalem the city of three faiths, the city of Pentecost should be the most peaceful city on earth.

Bishop Naoum has asked us to pray

*Almighty and Everlasting God: Our days are in your hands; we lift up all those in the Holy Land who are victims of violence and injustice, that you might empower your Church to bring healing to the wounded, relief to the suffering, and comfort to those who mourn; we pray also that you would soften the hearts of all those involved in the recent conflicts, that they would be led to work for justice and lasting peace in the land where your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ first came to bring hope and abundant life to all people; these things we ask in his Holy Name. Amen.*⁸

⁵ 1990, Orbis Books

⁶ p 177

⁷ <https://sabeel.org/>

⁸ <https://angmissions.org.nz/news/emergency-appeal--al-ahli-arab-hospital-gaza>