



Sharing together; and Sermon. Revd Nigel Uden on the Fifth Sunday after Trinity, 4th July 2021

Readings: II Samuel, 5.1-5, 9-10; Psalm 48; II Corinthians 12.2-10; Mark 6.13

Sharing Together



Jerusalem is a super-important place. If Israel is the yellow section of this map, then Jerusalem is right in its centre – geographically, historically and emotionally.

To many Israelis and Palestinians today, it matters more than anywhere else does, even if they don't live there.

It is a holy place for three of the world's great religions:

to *Christianity*, because Jesus' life so often focussed upon it, from his childhood visit to the Temple, through to his last week, when he died there and was raised and ascended;

to *Islam* Jerusalem matters, because so many of its key figures, like Abraham, were associated with it and in early days Muslims prayed facing towards Jerusalem;

and to *Judaism*, Jerusalem matters because for three thousand years it has been what it remains to this day, their spiritual home, wherever they are. We just heard an episode from the start of that story, when King David reigned from in Jerusalem for thirty-three years. Not long by Queen Elizabeth's standards, but David's reign was indeed long and didn't leave things as he'd found them.

I have had some valuable visits to Jerusalem. I especially like the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed, the church of Dominus Flevit where Jesus wept over the city, and the area around that Western wall, where one can find Jewish people praying, where the Al Aqsa Mosque finds Muslims at prayer, and where just a cock stride away, St Annes Church run by the White Fathers of Catholicism remains a place a worship. These three religions for whom this is a holy city have a focus in that corner of the place.

What Katie read to us about David's work in Jerusalem ended with reference to the *Millo*. We don't know exactly what it was, but it seems most likely to be part of the protective walls around the city. So it was important in itself as part of the defences of Jerusalem. The word *millu*, though, means

something like ‘to fill’. Perhaps refers to a mound, filled with soil or rubble, from which King David’s staff went on to build the city walls extending from the *Millo* to the right and the left.

Of itself, it doesn’t sound very glamorous or even noticeable. Yet it is essential to the completeness of the wall of Jerusalem.

And so it is with these renewed premises here at Downing Place. There are some beautiful, some clever, and some expensive new bits – the communion table so carefully, designed to echo the arches of the Emmanuel building and of this one here, the organ, the electrically-operated sky lights way above us, keeping everyone cool in summer. At the same, there are lots of *millo*; too, lots of modest bits that are essential but not much seen. There’s the carefully provided storage cupboards, the greatly improved lavatories, the miles of wiring, and a cellar full of technical stuff. I don’t suppose those things will get much of a mention in the prayers of dedication on 6th November. But maybe they should, seeing as the *Millo* got a place in II Samuel chapter five, verse nine, as part of the city of Jerusalem that David established.

And there’s one more point. Given that the church is its people, even more than it is its building, we have some people who are as modest as *millos*. The ones whose giving is not seen, whose praying is not out loud, whose caring is as discreet as a one-to-one phone call that no-one else knows about, yet whose place is as important as anyone else’s. We give thanks to God for them, too.

Today’s Psalm is about Jerusalem, and why it is so important. It’s important because God is there.

Sermon

Jerusalem of course is not just an ancient city, but a thoroughly contemporary city, renowned for its ecumenical religion, its related tourism, and its tense politics. Yet it’s so much more than that, and has been over several millennia. One of its names, Zion, goes back before the Israelites, and might mean something like ‘high point’, probably referring to the hill upon which Jerusalem was built.

Speaking of Jerusalem’s crowning glory, Psalm 48 celebrates God’s involvement in the city and specifically with the Temple. It’s God’s home, and to be in Zion – not just in the Temple - is to encounter the on-going story of God’s steadfast kindness and unending love. And yes, in this passage the word is our old friend *chesed*. God’s steadfast loving kindness is what people encounter if they walk around Jerusalem.

For the Psalmist, you see, Jerusalem is more than its unassuming *Millo*. As people walk round the place, there are impressive towers, ramparts, and citadels. It’s as if each one is intended as a witness, a reminder of Yahweh, their God. We’re not strangers to such ideas. Walk into Ely Cathedral and gaze at the ancient Octagon, or at the millennium installation, Jonathan Clarke’s *The Way of Life*: stirring us to wonder, they take us to another level today. And how many people have walked into this renewed sanctuary, stopped in their tracks, and murmured in perfect sixteenth-century Scots, ‘Wow’. Whatismore, just as Zion’s inspiring features stir people’s own sense of the divine and build up their faith, so the Psalmist urges them: ‘as you recall what God has done, tell this generation about it’. Tell them that God is God forever, and will always rule with care and compassion, through all time, beyond death, and into eternity’. (Psalm 48.14, *The Passion Translation* 2017) Of course, for the Christian, the everlasting-God is definitively revealed in the living the dying and rising of Christ. It’s in him that we find *chesed* expressed once and for all.

Is that just something for a few millennia back in a distant place? I can’t help thinking it is relevant to contemporary Cambridge, too. Is *this* not a city of inspiring citadels and towers ... alongside the punts and painted cows? As we attempt to discern what God is calling us to be as a church blessed with an abundance of people, of premises, and of other resources, I hear the Psalmist speaking to us directly. Don’t limit your understanding to what you gain on a Zoom meeting, or by gathering at the back of the premises as far away from the street as you can in the Gibson Hall or the Minister’s Room. Get outside. Walk around Cambridge. Be grateful for its heritage, seen in so many iconic

buildings. And let yourselves be transported into a renewed sense that just as God did marvellous things in days of old, so God is always and still that sort of God. Don't limit your admiration to what God did back in the day. Let God be God in 2021, showing that same *chesed* today as was transformative then.

For we all know it's still as needed today as it was three thousand years ago in Jerusalem. Is it not true that behind almost every front door there is someone who is living with a thorn in their flesh? An ailment, an anxiety, a regret, a 'known unknown'? Moreover, there are those who do not have a front door behind which to experience their thorn in the flesh. Those for whom home, for whatever reasons, is a shop doorway, a Christ's Pieces bench, a pal's sofa. Maybe they are as eager as St Paul for a word to persuade them, and deed to show them that the grace of God is sufficient for all their needs. And this Psalm commissions us, just as Jesus commissioned those first disciples, to go into this city and tell of the steadfast loving kindness of God, which we have discovered to be so life shaping and lifesaving.

Let's adapt Psalm 48 for our context,

'Walk about Cambridge,

go all around it, count its towers, consider well its ramparts; go through its citadels,

that you may tell this generation that this is God, our God for ever and ever.

The Lord will be our guide for ever.'

Or to put it another way, as the musicians are now going to do, here and now if you feel that you are one of the millio let your little light shine with the resilient flame of God's reliably resurrected and never again to be extinguished love. For as we do so we will make someone's life worth living.

Music for Reflection

The traditional Gospel Song, *This little light of mine*, arranged specially for this service by Mark Dawes.

Text: Oh, this little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.