

At Jerusalem



Dark and light are present in this view of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, symbolizing the dark and light places Jesus experienced, in and close to this city. Dark and light can also describe places we know, and the pain and joy in our own lives, where God is present.

During Lent we have been journeying with Jesus towards Jerusalem. He has had temptations along the way to turn aside or give up his travels, as we might have had also. Questions may have arisen in our minds such as, "Is this really what God wants?" "I am exhausted, how can I keep going?" "What is the point of all this?" "Where am I?"

To visit Jerusalem is a thrill, but it also has its disappointments. We think we shall see the same city which meant so much to Jesus, and outside of which he died on a cross, his dead body was placed in a tomb, and later raised to new life. But in 2,000 years things have changed. Yes, we can stand on the Mount of Olives and know it is the Mount of Olives Jesus visited. We can look across to Jerusalem, but the wall around the city is not the same wall as parts have been re-built. The Temple Mount is still there where the temple once stood, but instead of the temple there is an Islamic shrine, the 'Dome of the Rock'. Today this city is a sacred place for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

We know that Jesus loved Jerusalem. It was a place where Jews believed that God was present in the temple in a unique and special way, and where they could meet God.

If we walk along the narrow streets in the Old City of Jerusalem, we can feel very close to Jesus as he once walked along the same streets. Jerusalem can remind us that God is present wherever we are and however we feel.

As a sacred place, Jerusalem can be an important image for us in our Christian life. This is particularly so when we come to Holy Week, and recall all that happened to Jesus in and around Jerusalem during those days.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode a donkey from the Mount of Olives into the city of Jerusalem. People lined his way, rejoiced at his coming, spread branches and their cloaks on the ground in front of him and shouted out their welcome. It was an exciting event. Jesus entered the temple but as it was late, he and his disciples soon left and spent the night at Bethany. Each day for the next few days, Jesus returned to Jerusalem and the temple, teaching the people.

On Thursday evening, Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples in an Upper Room in Jerusalem. Judas left. At the end of the meal, Jesus and his disciples walked to the Mount of Olives. Jesus then took Peter, James and John to a garden nearby, Gethsemane. His friends fell asleep because they were tired. Jesus prayed alone and in agony. The horrors began.

Judas came to the garden with the chief priests and a mob. He identified and betrayed Jesus with a kiss. The disciples fled. Jesus was captured, taken to Herod and Pilate and condemned to death. Peter denied knowing Jesus.

The next day Jesus was led away to Golgotha, where he was stripped of his clothes, crucified and died. Joseph of Arimathea asked for Jesus' body and respectfully placed it in a rock tomb.

In the quiet of early Sunday morning, Jesus was raised from death to new life, and was seen by many of his friends.

Mary Magdalene saw Jesus present in her grief, and then in her utter joy, in a garden. Thomas saw Jesus present in his struggle to believe, in an Upper Room. Two disciples saw Jesus present on their walk to Emmaus and during a meal. Peter saw Jesus present in his forgiveness on a beach. These places and

experiences became sacred for those who were open to 'see' God present in them.

Sometimes we can be tempted to focus on the small unimportant things that people say or do to us, and not the basic life-giving words and actions that express for us God's presence and love. God is active in all of life, both dark and light places, for all is God's loved creation.

Whether we grieve at the loss of someone dear to us, delight to enjoy a new experience or trudge on through the ordinary and mundane moments of daily life, God is present with us and can bring new life to us. We may find that things and people we had despised or ignored, change when we open our eyes and begin to 'see' them from a different perspective. We then appreciate their beauty and the amazing gifts they offer to us.

The Jerusalem towards which we journey in Lent and where we arrive at Easter, can be any place, emotion or relationship. We can 'see' God present in our church, home, garden, street, and at the beach, as well as in our suffering, loneliness, happiness and friendships. When moving through these physical and emotional places, God's loving presence enables us to experience new resurrection life.

Jerusalem is a sacred place. What places are sacred for you -where you are open to 'see' God present?

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