Some thoughts on the Lectionary Readings for the second service - Year A, Easter 4

Lectionary Readings:	Ezra 3: 1-13
	Ephesians 2: 11-22
	Luke 19: 37-48

The Lectionary Readings for this service link directly with those for the second service last week. The Old Testament reading from Ezra goes back again to the return from the Exile in Babylon and the rebuilding of the Temple. Remember; the return happened in three stages, the first under Zerubbabel; the second under Ezra and the third under Nehemiah (when the city walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt).

In our reading (Ezra 3) the writer is describing the first days of the first return. For our thoughts we also turn to words from one of the prophets of the second return – Zechariah. (Zechariah 4; 6-9 NIV)

"So he (the Angel in Zechariah's vision) said to me, 'This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel (the Governor): "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty.

⁷ 'What are you, mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of "God bless it! God bless it!"'

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁹ 'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you.

We will return to the highlighted part of verse 6; but for now turn to the Gospel reading and the significance of some of the events recorded in the Lectionary reading.

The crowd are shouting: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

This is the Palm Sunday crowd – the earlier part of Luke's record where Jesus sends two disciples to fetch the colt, with an explanation to the owners if challenged!, has been omitted. Having brought the colt to Jesus, cloaks are thrown over its back and Jesus rides on it. As they approach the descent of the Mount of Olives the whole crowd praise God for all the miracles they have seen.

The Pharisees are not happy and rebuke Jesus, who says in reply:

"I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out"

Here, Jesus is unusually and indirectly, making a public statement about himself – as he nears the end of his earthly ministry. As the journey continues he weeps over Jerusalem, predicting its destruction and the failure of the Jewish nation to realise who he is and the salvation that is on offer.

During the coming week Luke records Jesus cleansing the temple – you will remember that in last week's Gospel, John had placed this event early in the ministry of Jesus. In the passage from John we read of Jesus saying:

"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

The reply was that it had taken 46 years to build the temple - and you will do it in three days? Jesus, of course, was speaking allegorically, of his forthcoming death and resurrection.

During that final week he was frequently in the Temple courtyards, at the centre of Jewish worship, teaching the crowds. With Passover approaching it is likely that, as at Pentecost, there would many visiting pilgrims to Jerusalem for the Festival.

Last week, there was a concentration in the readings on buildings and foundations. Paul takes us back to that theme in his letter to the Ephesians. He reminds them that Jew and Gentile alike are united through the death of Christ and the shedding of his blood. What happened in Jerusalem, that first Easter, swept the Jewish Law away – "the Veil of the Temple had been split from top to bottom). Gentiles have been brought into the Covenant promises.

Paul, speaking to the Gentiles among the Ephesian Christians, ends this passage:

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

"Built on the foundation"; "the chief cornerstone". We remember Paul, writing to the Corinthians, (the Epistle last week) said that there is only one foundation that can be laid – the foundation of Jesus Christ. To the Ephesians he speaks of Jesus as the **Cornerstone**. It takes us back to foundations.

The first and most important stone to be laid is the "Cornerstone", sometimes known as the "Foundation Stone".

It is the "Datum Stone" upon which all other bricks/stones are laid and ensures that the construction is built true. Here then, to the Ephesians, Paul describes Jesus as **"The Cornerstone"**, - the guide for all further building.

A "Hillsong, Australia" song expresses it this way:

My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame But wholly trust in Jesus' name.

> Christ alone, Cornerstone, Weak made strong, in the Saviour's love. Through the storm He is Lord Lord of all

When darkness seems to hide His face I rest on his unchanging grace; In every high and stormy gale My anchor holds within the veil, My anchor holds within the veil.

When he shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I then in Him be found; Dressed in His righteousness alone, Faultless, stand before the throne.

There is another "building" image of Jesus that can be used to express his centrality in our faith. For an Easter service a few years ago I used a PowerPoint presentation which showed an Arch on a sandy beach. The Arch was made from Smooth, Rounded, Boulders. No way was this good building material! But the arch stood because of the final stone at the top of the arch – the "Cap Stone" or "Keystone".

We have three useful images of Jesus:

The Foundation of our Faith The "Cornerstone", upon which all future building depends The "Keystone" or "Capstone" without which a curved structure falls.

All emphasise the centrality of Jesus in our Christian life and experience.

Returning to that time when the "exiles" return to Jerusalem.

They have been brought back by Jerubbabel – the Governor to be. The first exhortation to rebuild the Temple comes from the prophet Haggai. The second, (months later), comes from the prophet Zechariah in the passage quoted from Zechariah 4 at the beginning of these thoughts.

In that short passage, the Lord – speaking first through the angel, then through Zechariah – says:

"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit"

Let us make that our text and reflect on its meaning and importance for us:

This week. This month. This Year. For Life.

Eric Brown