

## Some thoughts on the Lectionary Readings for the second service – Year A, Easter 5

**Lectionary Readings:**        **Zechariah 4: 1-10**  
   **Revelation 21: 1-14**  
   **Luke 2: 25-32 (33-38)**

First reaction – what a disparate set of readings, there is no obvious connection. I must confess that there are times when I struggle with Lectionary readings, can I see any link?

It reminds me of a Sunday during my teaching exchange year in Australia. I was preaching at my adopted church for the year. I commented to the minister that it was sometimes hard to see a link, and was surprised to be told there isn't supposed to be any connection; it is just a way of covering the Biblical text in public worship. I still hope, with our Lectionary, to be able to link at least two of the readings!

Starting to do a little background reading I realised that there is a common theme running through all three readings this week – it is a theme of **Revelation**.

A question to ponder – is “Revelation” limited to those in the pages of the Bible or is it something still to be experienced today?

We look at the three readings, starting with Zechariah. The reading is still concerned with the rebuilding of the Temple by those Jews who have returned from Babylon.

“The gold lampstand and the two olive trees” was the fifth of eight visions that Zechariah received in a single night.

This vision is one of encouragement to Joshua, the High Priest, and to Zerubbabel, the Governor, in leading and supervising the construction work. There is copious oil, symbolizing the fullness of God's power through his Spirit – seven channels to each of the seven lamps giving 49 wicks in all! Oil also poured from the olive trees (verses 11-12). To the Jews, seven was the number of fullness or completeness.

When Zechariah asks the angel the meaning of the vision, the answer is that key verse mentioned last week:

*So he (the angel) said to me, 'This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty.*

..... Not by our own human might, not by our own human power, but through the Spirit of the Lord.

Our second reading is obviously a Revelation – the very name of the book where it is found! In chapter 1 we read that it was on the Lord's Day in Patmos – a Roman penal colony – that the apostle John was caught up in a huge spiritual vision. Our reading comes from Chapter 21, the penultimate chapter in the Bible. Through the chapters there are many different parts to the Vision. When we come to chapter 21, John is seeing a New Heaven, a New Earth and a New Jerusalem. The Lord – seated on His throne – proclaims that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

There are also cautionary words in this passage:

*Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.*

*<sup>8</sup> But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practise magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.'*

I remember a school chaplain who often left us with the impression that “We will all get there in the end – by whatever route”!

Rather, let us share in the words and sentiments expressed by Charles Wesley in one of his hymns:

Arm me with jealous care,  
As in Thy sight to live;  
And O Thy servant, Lord, prepare  
A strict account to give!

The Gospel reading from Luke records what happened when Mary and Joseph presented Jesus at the Temple in order to fulfil the Jewish Law.

The person who had received this Revelation was Simeon, a devout Jew living in Jerusalem, a man filled with the Holy Spirit. What was the Revelation he had received through the Spirit?

“He would not die until he had seen the Messiah” - the Messiah who had been looked for through generations past.

Moved by the Spirit he went to the Temple on the day that Jesus was being presented. He immediately recognised him and taking the baby in his arms he praised God with the familiar words of the “Nunc Dimittis”, words that have been used in Christian worship for centuries:

*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word.  
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation;  
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;  
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel (AV – KJV)*

Can you imagine the reaction of Mary and Joseph?

But that wasn't the end of Revelation that day! You will have noticed the Lectionary reading went from Luke 2: 25 - 32 with “optional” verses in brackets, verses 33-38.

As Simeon is blessing Mary and Joseph and speaking of what Jesus will do in the future, the prophet Anna came up to the group. We are told that she had been widowed after 7 years of marriage and then was a widow for a very long time (a footnote in NIV suggests the text may read that she had been widowed for 84 years). She never left the Temple but worshipped night and day – fasting and praying.

She had clearly received the same Revelation as Simeon - she gave thanks to God and spoke, again, about the child and his future.

Three Revelations:

To Zechariah –inspiring the rebuilding of the Temple.

To Simeon and to Anna – recognising who Jesus was and predicting the future.

To John – describing the New Heaven and Earth; giving a warning to those who have ignored the Lord.

God has spoken; through his prophets, through Jesus, and speaks today through His Spirit. We are reminded of this in a hymn by George Wallace Briggs (Hymns and Psalms 64).

God has spoken – by his prophets,  
Spoken his unchanging word,  
Each from age to age proclaiming  
God, the one, the righteous Lord.  
‘Mid the world’s despair and turmoil  
One firm anchor holds us fast:  
God is king, his throne eternal,  
God the first, and God the last.

God has spoken – by Christ Jesus  
Christ, the everlasting Son,  
Brightness of the Father’s glory,  
With the Father ever one;  
Spoken by the Word incarnate,  
God from God, ere time began’  
Light from Light, to earth descending,  
Man, revealing God to man.

God is speaking – by his Spirit,  
Speaking to the hearts of men,  
In the age-long word expounding  
God’s own message, now as then,  
Through the rise and fall of nations  
One sure faith yet standing fast;  
God still speaks, his word unchanging,  
God the first, and God the last.

**Submitted by Eric Brown**