

## Some thoughts on the Lectionary Readings for the second service – Year A, Easter 6 – from Eric Brown

**Lectionary Readings:**        **Zechariah 8: 1-13**  
   **Revelation 21: 22 – 22: 5**  
   **John 21: 1-14**

For the fourth week running our Old Testament reading is taken from the time when the Jews have just come back to Jerusalem and are setting about the task of rebuilding the Temple. Zechariah was the second prophet speaking at this time – encouraging High Priest, Governor and people to the task in hand.

In our reading today the prophet speaks of the Lord's concern for Zion. The Lord declares that He will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem – the Faithful City. He goes on to speak of those occupying the city; the elderly and the children.

In verse 6 we read these words:

*This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'It may seem marvellous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvellous to me?' declares the LORD Almighty.* (NIV)

The Lord is saying that his people may find what is happening to be unexpected, marvellous etc but it is not marvellous to Him – for He knows what will be.

As Arthur Ainger writes in the first line of his hymn:

“God is working his purpose out, and the time is drawing near;  
Nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be,  
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God,  
As the waters cover the sea.”

Once again, in this Lock-down period, it is encouraging to be reminded that ultimately God has a plan and He is in control. We may not see it immediately but we move forward with confidence.

Verse 13 carries a promise. The main NIV text records that Judah and Israel have been a curse among the nations but there is a translation footnote. An alternative reading could be that the names of Judah and Israel have been used in cursing or alternative 2, that they have been seen as being under a curse.

The prophet goes on to say that Judah and Israel will be a blessing. From a curse to a blessing, or, in the alternative translations their names will be used in blessings or they will be seen as being blessed.

The Old Testament is a continual story of God's people “following too much the devices and desires of their own hearts”. Generation after generation of prophets arose and proclaimed God's unchanging love for His people, urging them to seek Him again, and bringing the people back to the purposes of the Lord.

This of course is the story of those living under the Old Covenant.

We live under the New Covenant, centred in Jesus. In the passage from Revelation 21 our Temple theme continues – or rather there is an emphasis on the **lack of a Temple** in the New Jerusalem. We know how central the Temple and its worship were to the Jewish people and how, at Festival time Jews from all over the known world came to Jerusalem (see Acts 2). Yahweh dwelt in Jerusalem, He dwelt in the Holy of Holies and we remember how, at the moment Jesus died on the cross, the Veil of the Temple, keeping the Holy of Holies separate, was rent from top to bottom.

“God let Himself out!”

We now have direct access, through Jesus, to the Father. There is no Temple in the New Jerusalem – “*The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb*” **are its temple**”. We come to them to worship - not to a particular, special building.

(Rereading this I can't help thinking about the current situation. Church buildings are closed for worship but that is not the end of worship)

As John reminds us in his first letter - a letter written to Christians in general:

*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup> He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* (NIV)

For many centuries, as the Church developed its theology, access to the Father was through the Son but only with an intermediary priest brought into the picture. This is not what John says in his letter and going back to the Revelation

passage he is seeing the very illumination that we need in life to be coming from the Father and the Son, there is no need of sun or moon.

Jesus is our Advocate. Jesus, together with His and our Father, provides the illumination we need for every-day living but in our Gospel reading He is not recognised by the small group of disciples who have gone fishing. They are not the only ones who don't recognise Jesus after His resurrection.

Mary (Magdalene) had gone early to the tomb on the Sunday morning, and found it empty. She ran to tell the disciples that the body had been removed. Peter and John ran to the tomb saw the empty tomb and the folded grave clothes. After they left, Mary is outside the tomb weeping. She looks in and sees two angels who ask why she is weeping. Turning round she sees an unknown man standing near her. She is convinced the body has been removed and she doesn't know where it is. We read in John's Gospel that the man asks her why she is weeping and who it is she is looking for. In older translations we read the words "Supposing him to be the gardener". It is only when Jesus speaks her name that she realises who it is.

During my University days I remember going into one of my friend's room in our Hall of Residence. He was a Baptist and on his desk that evening was a small booklet – a sermon by Charles Spurgeon. The title on the cover struck me – "Supposing him to be the gardener". That title certainly set the thoughts in motion – what if it really had been the gardener? What would have ensued? But of course it wasn't the gardener and Mary belatedly recognised her risen Lord.

Later that same day we read (this time in Luke's Gospel) that two followers were making their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. We can imagine that it was not a journey they were enjoying. As they are joined by the stranger, the fellow traveller who wants to know what they are talking about, we read (NEB) "*They halted, their faces full of gloom*". They pour out all their foiled hopes and aspirations concerning Jesus who explains to them the Old Testament Messianic prophecies but they still fail to recognise Him. It is only after inviting the stranger to spend the night with them and sitting down to a meal that they recognise Him as He breaks the bread. On this occasion Jesus is not recognised by His words but by His actions. I have a vivid picture of the two of them sprinting back to Jerusalem to share their confirmation to the rumour that Jesus is alive – was the world record for 7½ miles broken that evening?

In today's Gospel, the disciples are returning from a night of fishing where they have caught nothing. There is a man standing on the Lake shore. He asks "*Friends, haven't you any fish?*" – he knew that it had been a fruitless night's effort. Then comes the instruction to throw the net to starboard and they will find fish. (One commentator suggests the possibility that Galilean fishermen never cast nets to the right of the vessel so this was an unusual suggestion.) The disciples do throw out their nets – contrast this with the earlier time when Jesus had been in Simon Peter's boat teaching the crowd (Luke 5). When his teaching is finished he tells Peter to move out into deeper water and let down the nets. You remember Peter's reply? "*Master! we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything*" Then he seems to realise what he is saying and who he is speaking to. "*But because you say so, I will let down the nets*".

In John 21 there is no question of not following the instruction, even though it is coming from a stranger on the shore. (Another practical and possible explanation suggested by the commentator is that a shoal of fish in the shallow water could be seen from the shore). The catch is there and it is John who realises that the man on the shoreline is Jesus. When he tells Peter we see the latter's characteristic and impulsive action – leaping into the water to get to Jesus.

Mary M failed to recognise him in the garden; His followers trudging back to Emmaus failed to recognise Him; His close companions of several years failed to recognise Him as He stood on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. All came to recognise Him, either by what He said or by what He did.

Do we, similarly, fail to see Jesus, does He speak or act so that we recognise Him?

“When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?  
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there?  
I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?  
When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?  
When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?”

Wherever you travel, I'll be there, I'll be there,  
wherever you travel I'll be there.