

ASCENSION AND PENTECOST ARE UPON US

Another month, another Jewish holiday is upon us! Yesterday, was Jerusalem Day, 1st June, which in the secular calendar, should be 6th June commemorating the 6 Day War of 1967 and the reunification of Jerusalem as a Jewish city after 1900 years. We were invited to a reception given by the Mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat, a shrewd and good looking businessman, in line for leadership as Prime Minister of this nation in due time. The venue each year is the Tower of David, or the Citadel, by the Jaffa Gate, the only remnant of construction left by the Romans from Herod the Great and of the city Jesus knew. The whole of Jerusalem has been full of young people, Israeli flags and celebration, except from the Palestinians, so the atmosphere in East Jerusalem when the marching bands went round the Old City was somewhat muted. The whole conundrum of living in a culturally and politically “divided” city hits us every day and yet we hear of President Obama’s discussions with Mr Netanyahu and wonder how they ever believe this city can be fixed! As British people, we should appreciate that more than most because our history in this land has been far from glorious.

We have the enormous privilege of living and working here and meeting so many significant people and building friendships. Our dear Reuven and Hedva, survivors of the Holocaust, from Tel Aviv travelled up by bus from Tel Aviv to meet us one Sunday here in Jerusalem. We invited them to the morning service at Christ Church, near the Jaffa Gate, which they were so intrigued by the worship in Hebrew and English, reading the Old and New Testaments and the communion which so resembles the Shabbat (Sabbath) meal, as the bread and wine are blessed with familiar prayers to them. We took them around the Garden Tomb and had tea here before leaving them at the Central Bus Station at 5.30 in time for their Bridge Club at 7 pm back in Tel Aviv, where they had left in the early morning – both of them aged 85! By contrast, our new gardener, Rami, leaves his parents home at Bethlehem at 4.30 in the morning, crosses the Checkpoint at 6.00 am to the house of his wife and two boys, in order to take one son to school, (they are expecting another baby next month) arrives at work here by 7.30 and returns in the afternoon to the family home until 10.00 pm when he has to leave for Bethlehem as he has no permit to reside in Jerusalem. He is a trained pastor and works very hard to support his family, but never complains about the situation. We love our local traders and neighbours, and are hosting another street party soon to enable them to visit us and meet one another, Jew, Christian and Muslim in this special Garden where Jesus appears still to those who seek Him. We recently met a man called Tasir Saada, now a local pastor, but formerly young “hit-man” in Fatah, who worked personally for Yasser Arafat. As a Palestinian refugee he became an ardent terrorist at 17, killing many for the ‘liberation’ of his land. Some years later “Tass” became a transformed man when he met the living Lord Jesus Christ in the USA and now works to build bridges here amongst those he was trained to hate.

Richard and I had a glorious week in sunny and, unexpectedly rainy North Cyprus during May joined by Iona and loved relaxing in the gift of what is becoming a precious pied à terre in Bellapais, thank to the generosity of my godfather, Iain and Fabienne. We were more than ready for the break and returned refreshed for the summer heat which has not really arrived even by early June, unlike the UK! Our Rosanna arrived last week for her time of R and R, and the three of us went up to the Sea of Galilee for another wonderful two nights at a retreat house owned by CMJ which is so recuperative to many local Christian workers in the land. We had a great hike down Mount Arbel, the vast escarpment overlooking the peaceful waters, clutching iron hand holds as we descended one vertical slope and I wondered if we would make it! Later, the same day, we flopped into the waters below at Kibbutz Ginosar and rejoiced in the variety of geography which makes this land not only a Holy One, but so appealing. Next day, we were at the Dead Sea and hiking in Ein Gedi to the natural springs of the oasis there, where the young David hid from King Saul and David’s son, King Solomon mentions in his own love poetry. Everywhere we travel has some association with a location in Scripture and as we read the Bible, I am so delighted to be able to identify the places where other men and women met with the Living God and to believe and trust in the Word who became flesh and lived for a while among us. Muslims read in the Koran of “The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary was ... the messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him.”(Sura 4:171)

We, as Christians, celebrate Ascension Day today, when the angels said to the disciples on the Mount of Olives: “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same you have seen Him go into heaven.” Two American visitors separately said here in the Garden this afternoon “Now I believe”. On Monday, we start the Jewish Feast of Shavuot, or Pentecost: may the eyes and the hearts of the people of this land and from far off regions too, be opened as they were on that other feast of Pentecost when Simon Peter, the fisherman from Galilee said: “Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified both Lord and Christ (Messiah).” Acts 2:26. It remains our challenge and our joy to make this known here as we tend a small garden and welcome our visitors from Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth.

Rosalind Meryon 1 June 2011