

Our dear Friends,

27 March 2010

We arrived back here after our time in the UK after a week of reported disturbances in Jerusalem, but be encouraged that we have had one of the busiest weeks of the year here – visitors seemingly not put off coming to this part of East Jerusalem. Richard and I had a wonderful time in the UK with a birthday, two speaking engagements, one for me at a beautiful Women's World Day of Prayer in Combe Down, and the two of us with the Ray and Jill Lockhart for "An Evening in Jerusalem" at our own Holy Trinity Church. Thank you to any of you who came; we were really delighted that the church was full and that we had enough baklava to serve with coffee from the Old City here. We are so encouraged that our three churches in Bath support us and the work of the Garden. Along with other meetings, Richard had some time with the Garden's new UK Treasurer, Peter Houston, who is swiftly and graciously taking over from someone who has been very unwell. Meanwhile, Richard's 88 year old mother and I went over to the Isle of Wight in glorious sunshine for two nights and enjoyed exploring together there.

Richard is endeavouring to get the Garden more visibility in the UK and has written about eight articles to come out in the UK press in the days up till Easter. Keep your eyes peeled for IDEA, the Baptist Times, the Methodist Recorder, the Church of England News, the Church Times, Contact, Inspire and Discovery. If you see them, do please keep us a copy! The Jerusalem Post is also running a Garden Tomb feature this week. In the Jerusalem studio of the BBC last Thursday, he recorded about 14 Easter Day messages to be broadcast across the UK on BBC local radio on Palm Easter Sundays; also on UCB and CFI. On Easter Monday, when the Garden will be ringing with the worship of a large American group, he will be doing a live broadcast from here to all the folk assembled at Spring Harvest.

This coming Monday is the eve of the Passover, so significant for Jewish people world-wide. Many have come to Jerusalem for the festival and some are visiting the Garden too. All the Jewish housekeepers (and hotels!) are busy cleaning their homes to make sure that no yeast is hiding in the dust and make their homes spick and span for Pesach. We are celebrating having some much needed rain here this morning, for English people it is hard to rejoice at rain, but it may be the last we have until the autumn and in the garden we depend on water, even with a huge and ancient cistern, containing over a million litres that we can draw on for some of our water.

On Maundy Thursday, our Easter vigil will start with an evening Communion service at Christ Church, the CMJ centre near the Jaffa Gate, after which we shall join pilgrims moving down the Via Dolorosa and out of St Stephen's Gate, across the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, gathering there with many others there. On Good Friday, there will be a service here in the Garden, which will be closed to tours, but open for quiet prayer and meditation through the day. Saturday will be a "normal" day until 4 pm, when about 500 Arabic Christians and Hebrew believers will come to start their Easter with us. For many this is a very special gathering with families who are separated for the rest of the year in the West Bank. They will apply for permits to visit and some will go on to the Holy Sepulchre for the Greek Orthodox celebration of the Holy Fire, which I have yet to understand. We shall have to move fast to clear the Garden, and get some rest before at 0430 when we start to prepare for our Resurrection Day. Four services follow one another, two in English (at 0630 and 0930), then in French and another for Scandinavians. This has all been a logistical challenge as a first for the new Director, operating somewhat blind here!

Richard and I spent some time in the Old City one morning this week distributing leaflets with details of our services in the Garden in various locations, and walked through all four quadrants of faith and ethnicity, the Muslim, Christian, Armenian and Jewish, each with their distinctive styles but with little apparent demarcation between each. I don't think that I can ever tire of such expeditions here with so much to understand and view in every direction. We visited the restaurant of a new Greek Orthodox friend, Abu Emil, alias Constandi, to make final arrangements for the Easter Monday dinner for all our Garden Tomb staff at his restaurant on the Via Dolorosa; with typically generous Arabic hospitality, he gave us delicious Turkish coffee. We had just passed one large group with a big wooden cross carried by several ladies at Station 8 a few yards away. After this we walked upwards and, hearing the sound of organ music, went through a doorway and up some stairs to a huge Franciscan church to find a nun playing at a vast organ; we sat in the dark and cool nave for a while before emerging back into the narrow streets jam packed with its little shops. We love being here!

Please pray:

- For all our services here; for order and a real sense of God's presence in this place.
- For new permanent staff settling in, and for others we need for key roles here.
- For new volunteer couples who are considering short term service in the Garden.
- For our children with whom we shall be spending a few days in Cyprus after Easter.

From Philippians 3: May you 'know Christ and the power of His Resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His Sufferings, becoming like Him in His Death, and, so, somehow to attain to the Resurrection from the dead'. May the Risen Lord be present with you at this time. He is NOT here, He has Risen! Allelulia!