

Luke 9,41-48 10 after Trinity 9.8.2015
St Peters Pretoria

41As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

45When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. 46“It is written,” he said to them, “ ‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”

47Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. 48Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.

Dear sisters and brothers,

When does a man weep? When you lose a loved one. When you are in terrible pain.

Jesus, as he approaches Jerusalem, stops, looks, and starts weeping - for none of the two reasons. Jerusalem is not dying. It is the bustling capital of the country, the temple and palace with its glorious splendour catching the eye of the pilgrim approaching the city.

Jesus is not in pain either. In fact, he is surrounded by a joyous crowd who shouts: “Blessed is the king who comes in the Name of the Lord!”

His tears are for a different reason - one of the saddest reasons why a man and a woman can weep: a loved one is heading for disaster and nothing that you do or say makes them change direction.

When your enemy heads for disaster, you might be waiting in anticipation, even with a sense of pleasure. If it is someone you hardly know, you might just be astounded about their foolishness.

But if it someone you love, and you have put in a lot of effort and love and patience to guide and re-direct him, then the pain is almost unbearable when you see that loved one just rushing on towards disaster.

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. The crowds around him worship him, hail him as king. But the leaders are telling him to shut them up and not to cause a commotion. Yes, the crowds are singing: “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” - but their leaders are conspiring how to get rid of this Jesus. And soon the leaders will convince the crowd to join them in chanting: Crucify him!

Jesus weeps over the city, the country, the leaders that should know better and don’t.

Luke, in his introduction to the gospel, states that he carefully researched various sources before compiling his gospel. He compiled it at about 75 AD - five years after the devastating destruction of Jerusalem. How must he have felt when he came across this passage, where Jesus is speaking 40 years before the destruction. Luke must have realised the frustration, the hurt and the passion of Jesus at that moment. And Luke was aware of the tragedy that indeed the people did not heed the call in the 40 years that followed.

This Sunday in many Churches is called “Israel Sunday”, since the readings focus on God’s chosen people Israel, and his story with them. We could now also focus on present day Israel, and start weeping again at the current situation in that country and the city of Jerusalem - the suppression of the Palestinians, the hundreds of people that are being killed each year due to religious and political tensions.

But I ask myself: How does Jesus feel about what is happening in our country, our capital, amongst our people and our leaders?

I believe that Jesus wept when for decades white Christians and their leaders regarded and treated black people as inferior human beings. He wept when he tried to show them how Christians should treat others, and they ignored it.

Today we remember how 59 years ago more than 20 000 women marched to the seat of Government in Pretoria, protesting against unjust laws. On

both sides there were Christians - yet it took a long while for some to realise where repentance and turn around was needed!

21 years ago, at the same Union buildings, South Africa celebrated the start of its new democracy. I believe that then Jesus was smiling - that a nation has found a way forward in justice and peace.

But I believe that today he is weeping again, because again Christians are very selective in when and how they want to follow him, and when they rather ignore him and his commandment to love, to forgive, even your enemies.

On the one hand the people of our country are amongst the most religious in the world, with a major part being Christian. Yet, at the same time our corruption index is one of the highest. Our spending on education and health is amongst the highest per capita in Africa - yet the outcome is amongst the worst.

Despite the fact that almost 80% of the population confesses to be Christian, there is hardly a country in the world with more abuse of women, children and the aged.

Jesus weeps - because he loves! Jesus hurts, because his loved ones are busy destroying life, and they don't realise it!

Has Jesus given up on us? Had he given up on Jerusalem?

No! As he enters the city he goes to the temple, and in a powerful act tries to show where the core of the problem lies: Religion had become a business. Faith was no longer about a relationship to the Lord, but a trade off, a business transaction, where blessings are bought and God is for sale.

To what extent might this also be the core of many of South Africa's problems? When faith becomes a sugar coating, the finishing touch for successful people, it too has become a commodity.

What does Jesus want to tell the people? "My house is a house of prayer" - Prayer is the core of our relationship to the Lord, prayer, where I ask for guidance and am open to be guided. Prayer, where I acknowledge my failings and repent of my wrongdoings. Prayer, where I pray for my

enemies, where I bring to God the challenges that I cannot cope with. Prayer makes me humble to recognize my limitations, my weaknesses. Prayer makes me strong to stand up against what is wrong. Prayer gives me courage, because I realise that I have a Lord who leads the way.

Jerusalem was only destroyed 40 years after Jesus had wept over the city. For 40 years the people had the chance to turn around, to change - but they did not. Jesus knew this, and he wept.

Today we, living in our country's capital, again are called to become people of prayer, people that ask God for guidance, people who are willing to follow him and his teachings. We are challenged to be loyal to Him above everything else - above loyalty to a party, a job, a career. We are called to not only shout: Hosanna to the king, and then go our own ways, but to allow him to change our ways to his glory.

In this service we are baptising four children. This is not a religious sugar coating. No, in this baptism we hand these children over to the Lord. Jesus says to them: You are mine, to live with me from now on to eternity! Let us be reminded of our own baptism: I belong to the Lord, not to myself! I am his child, always and every where!

We are also celebrating communion. There we receive the promise of the Lord: I am with you always! We taste, we eat we drink this promise, this Lord himself. And through that we receive the strength and the courage to go out and serve him.

I can picture the Lord, tears on his cheeks, yet smiling as he blesses us and says: And now go and make a difference! Go, and live as my children! Go and be different - be honest, be good, be caring, be humble. Go, my child, and be my child!

Amen

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