

*St. John's, Tappahannock, VA
The Second Sunday in Lent
March 4, 2007*

*"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!"
The Rev. William T. Pickering*

In the Gospel for this morning some Pharisees come to Jesus to warn him that Herod is looking for him and wants him dead.

Jesus tells them to tell Herod (that fox) that he has work yet to do before he comes to Jerusalem, and prophets are only killed in Jerusalem. Sadly, the Old Testament record presents that as basically true. His comments are also significant because it seems that he is quite aware of what is to come for him when he does get to Jerusalem.

Then Jesus proceeds with a very sad lament over Jerusalem – "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

It is clear that there is great disappointment for the state of the Holy City and for her sordid history in the lives of the prophets.

Let's take a look at Jerusalem. It is 2007 – the 21st century after Jesus was put to death there and the exact same lament could be made now as was then – only things may just be a little worse.

Jerusalem is a Holy place and central to three of the major world religions – truly the Holy Land – and it is torn by strife as all three of those religions struggle for their part of the Holy City and try to drive one another away. It is a place where the prophets are still stoned, and many of those sent to it are killed.

2000 years – "Jerusalem, Jerusalem". What are we to do?

I was born in 1946 and am in the first wave of the Baby Boomers coming to retirement. We grew up in the '60's which was a very different time in the life of our country.

We had to be the most naïve generation as we actually believed that poverty and hunger could be eradicated and that Justice could prevail, humans could learn to live together and love each other and that there could be peace on earth.

We had the unbelievable arrogance to say that human kind had come of age. Technology was expanding at an incredible rate, prosperity seemed possible for all. Human beings must be at the pinnacle of their development.

Yet, as one of my seminary professors said so eloquently about human beings come of age – if that be true, then what's next – senility?

Human beings are in a constant process of becoming.

Now, looking at the human condition, had human beings come of age in the '60's, we were not going to become much. How far have we come in this process of growing into the full stature of our humanity?

Can we look at the present state of the world and wonder at how far we have come?

Our technology and knowledge has expanded at an incredible rate, and we know more than any previous generation of human beings, and are exposed to more than would have been expected in a thousand lifetimes in Jesus time, and we are more capable of destroying one another and destroying the whole creation than we have ever been.

What is the clearest symbol of how far we have come as human beings – Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Palestinians and Israelis – Moslems, Jews and Christians – intolerance and prejudice at humanities best. Turf battles and suicide bombers and terrorism honed to a fine art – Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Jerusalem is not just a symbol of the political, religious and economic state of the world, but of our own personal prejudices and biases. In fact, sin and evil, are alive and well and living quite

powerfully in this world of the 21st century – and all we have to do is look to Jerusalem for all the evidence we need.

As we come to Lent, it is important to not get caught in the simple rules that we set for ourselves in this season. Breaking my rule of not eating potato chips and salty snacks is not going to have a profound impact on the state of the world – or the salvation of humankind, but my pride, my selfishness, my prejudice, my arrogance, my apathy, will all contribute my fair share to the state of the world's ills. My hope is that my rule about potato chips might bring that to mind as well. There was a popular song in Church camps in the '60s – "Let there be Peace on Earth and let it begin with me." That might well be a good place to focus this Lent – Let there be peace, justice, mercy, tolerance, service, sacrifice, love, compassion, joy – and let it begin with me. Jerusalem, Jerusalem!

Lest we lose track of what we are about in this interim time at St. John's, we need to focus some on just how important it is that we are here, and that the ministry of St. John's grows, prospers and touches more and more lives.

Look to Jerusalem and consider the state of the world that she represents. There are a great many more of us on this planet now than there were then when Jesus came.

This incredible mass of humanity on this globe is not one bit more able to deal with sin and the effects of evil than our forebears and the potential for destruction and disaster grows with each passing decade.

Several weeks ago, I asked if this was a place of believing – it must be.

As we consider the future of this community in Tappahannock, we need to remember Jerusalem and know just how important what we do here is – if there is to be any future at all.

It is just a little parish where nice folks gather, but it is also a place where those nice folks share their lives and worship the Lord their God.

It is a place where we are all confronted with the challenge of the Gospel and where we can learn about the will and love of God – do we dare treat it as if it did not make a difference?

We need to see this place as a place of revival and renewal, where spirits are raised and where the challenges of being the people of God are confronted and addressed.

If it is just a place to come to fulfill some religious obligation or simply for fellowship and social connection, we are wasting resources that could be better spent on redeeming the world.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem needs to be before us to remind us that sin has not vanished and that we are still called to fight against evil. The future depends on it – The future depends on us.

Let us not waste this wonderful place – or our time in it.

Amen.