



July 3rd

THE NEW SHOFAR

it was not because you were more in number than any other people that the lord...chose you... but it is because God loves you, and is keeping the oath which He swore to your fathers...Deuteronomy 7:7-8

In today's Old Testament reading, the message is delivered to a people who have been battered, bruised and seemingly abandoned by the God who first called them into the land. They have been torn apart by war and terror and barely surviving in their Babylonian exile. It is in this place of darkness God's prophet reaches out to them with a soothing message of hope. Jerusalem, the holy city of God, the place of God's own choosing, the concrete, geographical scene for the unfolding of the divine promises has now gone. Instead of being a beacon of human greatness to the other nations, it has *become a wilderness ... a desolation (Isaiah 64:10)*. As the city walls crumbled around this defeated people, so too hope died.

God's promise was so tied up in His guarantee to the Jews that the land of Canaan and the holy city Jerusalem would be theirs forever, that hope burned to ashes as its mighty walls fell to pagan hordes. They had been *burned by fire ... our pleasant places have become ruins (64:11)*. They were left to ponder the words of the psalmist: *God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns (Psalm 46:5)*.

Not only were they without land and possessions, they also had to struggle with their pain and fear of having been abandoned by God (**Isaiah 63:19**)...*We have long been like those whom you do not rule, like those not called by your name.*

Rejoice? In what can we be rejoicing?

Today's text begins with the invitation to "rejoice", to "rejoice" because God is doing something new: *Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her. (Isaiah 66:10)*. In what were they to rejoice? In something they could not yet see. In a promise God had made to them in the call of Abraham. That gift, that new reality was the gift of fulfilment. Something God was doing in human history, and they were located right in the middle of this divine activity. All they could see of their sacred City Jerusalem was a pile of rocks and yet, for those who had eyes to see out of that ruin new realities were already under construction. In that new world, there would no longer be mourning and sorrow. In their place would be consolation, and delight (**Isaiah 66:11**... *that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious nipples*).

These carefully crafted poetic lines make it clear that it is impossible to separate God's comforting work from the reality that is Jerusalem: *I [God] will comfort you; you shall be comforted by means of Jerusalem*. This is both a powerful

image but also one that brings great comfort. God comforts Israel (us) in the same way a mother might comfort her baby. When she is holding her child she is not only keeping her safe but also reassuring her. She is celebrating this bundle of joy with a sense of abiding rapture (*and dandled on her knees*). This mother for us is God, the God who is further binding Himself to His people through a sure promise and we can build our lives on the integrity of that promise.

Where we see a pile of rocks, God is revealing the chance of a new beginning

God's promises in **Isaiah 66:10-14** bring the old world of ruin to an end, and in its wake, create a new world, one in which Jerusalem is a joy. In this new world, Jerusalem is no longer a place of suffering and collapse; its life and destiny are marked by gladness, love, joy, and consolation.

But for men and women of faith, nothing is that simple! Israel had suffered enormously through the exile, cut off from their land and from their God. Then, when some were allowed to return in anticipation of these great blessings they had been promised, they found only further suffering. The small groups of exiles who returned home faced hardship, famine, political in-fighting, and economic oppression. Their weariness, after generations of domination and humiliation, must have been unbearable.

Now how things have changed. The image is that of a city where there is plenty for everyone. Yahweh likens Jerusalem to a mother whose breasts are heavy with milk—where the infant can nurse and drink deeply—can be satisfied and delighted. Is this not a wonderful image for us today? There in the middle of all of this rubble and death God comes to Jerusalem as a comforting mother, a mother feeding her children from her own abundance. Importantly, what does this loving motherly God do? He calls them to mission.

How odd of God to choose the Jews – Ogden Nash

This famous one-line stanza by Nash is not saying something negative about the Jews. On the contrary, it is saying something fabulous about God. When God chooses a person, it is not on the basis of our ability to carry out the task the Almighty has in mind. Our task will be fulfilled through grace and not through sweat, money and brains. Here we have the Jews. A crushed people, a nation who is not really a nation at all. They have nothing to offer but sadness and hope. And yet, it was from this broken people God brought forth the Saviour of the world. Light shines in our world today because God rejected the powerful and chose instead those who would rely on Him and Him alone.

We are no different today for we too can say...*how odd of God to choose the people of Kingston SE, or Gordon, or Murray Bridge...or Brisbane...* However, it is out of us that God continually brings forth a Saviour for the world.

