

John 11.45-57(end); Ezek. 37:21-28 (end); Jer 31.10-13.
Passiontide Taizé Service: Saturday 8th April, 2017
St. Andrew's Totteridge, 7 for 7:30 p.m.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer (Ps 19:14)

We are now in what was traditionally called Passiontide, the time when we remember God's passiveness and passion as part of the meaning of *Pascha* (The word connects not only with the Hebrew *Pesach* or Passover, but also with the Greek *paschein*, to suffer). Traditionally in this week the colour of the vestments turned to the red of Christ's bloody passion, and crosses and other images were veiled in purple. Modern Roman Catholicism discourages these visually dramatic practices, but some churches in the C of E retain a distinctive office and set of propers for Passiontide. Whatever your tradition, we are witnessing in this Passiontide the will of God to save his children come true.

Our readings share this common theme – the will of God. Ezekiel speaks of how God repeatedly says, “I will take the people of Israel... and bring them to their own land. I will make them one nation in the land... I will save them from the apostasies into which they have fallen... I will be their God.” And the prophesy concludes, “I will make a covenant of peace with them... I will bless and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them for evermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be with them; ...they shall be my people.”

Jeremiah speaks of how ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock... I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.’ And psalm 121 speaks of how “He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber... The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.”

By way of ironic contrast, it is out of the mouths of the chief priests and Pharisees in John ch.11 that voice is given to the realisation of the will of God. In all their fearfulness they cry, “What are we to do? ...everyone will believe in him...” And Caiaphas confirms the prophecy when he says that Jesus is about to die for the good of the nation, and so it is that “from that day on they planned to put him to death.”

Having begun Lent with a strong initiative to simplify our lives and move into a starker spiritual landscape, we have come up against our own vulnerability and our need to entrust ourselves to the active healing and forgiving power of God. But now, as the Passover draws near once again, and even as we figuratively offer up our own bodies with our dried-up bones to be raised afresh, our hearts to be re-inscribed with love, our spirits to be sown deep in the ground and harvested anew, our emptiness to be traversed with the pathways and rivers of God's spirit – we find, strangely, a God who is not just exercising his own will, he is also entrusting himself to *our* power.

Spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

John 11.45-57 - The Plot to Kill Jesus

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, 'What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.' ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰ You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' ⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. ⁵³ So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

⁵⁴ Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.

⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?' ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

Ezekiel 37:21-28

²¹ then say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land. ²² I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms. ²³ They shall never again defile themselves with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. I will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

²⁴ My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. ²⁵ They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there for ever; and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them for evermore. ²⁷ My dwelling-place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ²⁸ Then the nations shall know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them for evermore.

Jeremiah 31.10-13

¹⁰ Hear the word of the Lord, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.'

¹¹ For the Lord has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

¹² They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of
the Lord,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.

¹³ Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.
I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for
sorrow.