



Pilgrimage to Robben Island



***Prepared by the Cathedral Church of St George
For visitors from the Companion Diocese of York, UK
(Archdeaconry of The East Riding)
& Diocese of Cape Town***

***Thursday, 4th November,
2010***

The Way of the Cross – the Via Dolorosa, is an ancient religious observance. The faithful journey with Jesus to His death, but it is also the journey to life for it is in being willing to lose our life that Jesus tells us we will find it. This pilgrimage is based on seven stations in which we remember the story of the stripping away of the dignity of God's people through discrimination and dispossession. It is also the story of the triumph of life over suffering & pain and the coming to the place of hope, joy and peace.

Robben Island Pilgrimage

First Station: *site looking back at Cape Town and the Mountain*

As the prison ferry left its moorings in Table Bay this picture receded further and further as the boat left the safety of the harbour hitting the choppy waters of the open bay, taking prisoners further and further from the familiar.

Theme – CREATION

Reading 1: Psalm 8

¹ O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. ² From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. ³ When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: ⁷ all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, ⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Silence

Reflection

The vista is breathtakingly beautiful. The bay and the majestic mountain beyond evokes awe and wonder, inviting us to interaction and engagement. The African sky forms a canopy, the Atlantic Ocean caresses the coastline with its gentle lapping and at times admonishes it with its fierce beating. And the mountain! “Hoerrikwagga!” as the ancients named her. She once stirred from the ocean bed and rose to take up guard at the gateway to the continent. Faithfully at her post, she sighs mournfully for all the pain she has observed over the ages. The ocean is home to a rich variety of species which frolic in the clear waters above the sea-bed rich in diamonds and oil. This beauty and this bounty witnessed shocking brutality and watched in disbelief each humiliation, each victimisation, each wickedness perpetrated. Life on this island prison enforced a regimental order over the natural rhythm of creation.

Each pilgrim is invited to take a small item, a stone, a shell to touch and carry.

Let us pray

Leader: O Lord, our Sovereign ...

*Pilgrim: **Lead us to Your light and goodness. Amen***

We walk on to the second station.

Second Station: *site of the Visitor's Centre*

Here political prisoners received visits from their families and lawyers. Plate glass separated prisoners & visitors and they communicated through a faulty sound system. Physical contact was not allowed.

Theme – FAMILY

Reading 2: St Mark 3: 31-35

³¹ Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him.

³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you. ³³ Who are my mother and my brothers? he asked. ³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.

Silence ...

Reflection

We feel the elements on our skin – the warm sun, the cool breeze, a hard stone in our hand, the smoothed ridges of a shell. Through touch we entered the world – the hands of the midwife on the soft skin of a baby and being held in a warm and comforting embrace – bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh. Contact and touch are our first human experiences outside the womb. Touch is etched on the DNA of our humanity, from being knit together in our mother's womb, to each sinew and tendon being joined, to the slap which made us gasp for our first breath. Through touch we navigate life from mother to father, to sister to brother, to friend, to lover and to stranger.

In this place the regime re-birthed people into a world of separateness – cutting them off from those who were of their own flesh – children born of touch and intimacy and contact. Here was created a world that divided and separated the family by starving the soul of human touch. When this happens, who now is my mother, my brother and my sister?

Silent reflection

Leader: May the peace of the Lord be with you always

*Pilgrim: **And also with you.***

We greet each other with a sign of peace.

Leader: O Lord our Sovereign

*Pilgrim: **Lead us to Your light and goodness. Amen***

We walk on to the third station.

Third Station: *site of The Kramat*

The Kramat is a symbol of the burial place of Pangeran Chakra Denigrat, the Asian Prince of Madura who died on the island in 1754. He was one of the Muslim leaders and high ranking officials who resisted Dutch colonization in the East Indies. The Dutch banished some of these leaders to Robben Island in 1682. A simple shrine was built in his memory and his body was later returned to his son in Indonesia. Near the Kramat there is also the grave of Hadjie Matarim who died on the island in 1755.

Theme – FAITH

Reading 3: St Luke 10: 30-35

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

Silence

Reflection

Faith stories have their genesis in the desire for freedom. Faith believes that the God who made humanity also desires their freedom from whatever hinders that plan of God for their dignity and the right to be fully human. Little can suppress that God-given desire for dignity and freedom no matter how stifling the efforts can be to suppress it and impose a foreign will on it. Strength and courage originate in the heart of God. 'The Comforter' – a name by which Christians refer to God's Spirit – is the fortifier which strengthens believers in the face of obstacles to freedom and dignity. The human spirit which endured repression, banishment & isolation – so closely linked with this island – was strengthened by the Divine Spirit to keep believing that goodness is stronger than evil, love stronger than hate and life is stronger than death.

Leader: O Lord our Sovereign

Pilgrim: **Lead us to Your light and goodness. Amen**

We walk to the main door of the prison

Fourth Station: The Prison

The years 1960 & 1961 were a key turning point in South African resistance politics and in the way the state responded. On 24th March, 1961, the South African Navy handed control of Robben Island to the Prison Services. In March, 1960, the apartheid state responded violently to protests against 'pass laws' in various places, including Sharpeville, Langa & Pondoland. The apartheid state crushed the uprising and arrested hundreds of men. A number were imprisoned on the island. Even though they were charged with offences under the common law, they were really the first political prisoners on the island under apartheid.

Theme – JUSTICE

Reading 4: Isaiah 10:1-4

¹ Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, ² to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. ³ What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? ⁴ Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain.

Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

Silence

Reflection Poem: **"I know why the caged bird sings"** - Maya Angelou

*A free bird leaps on the back of the wind
And floats downstream till the current ends
And dips his wings in the orange sun's rays
And dares to claim the sky.*

*But a bird that stalks down his narrow cage
Can seldom see through his bars of rage
His wings are clipped and his feet are tied
So he opens his throat to sing.*

*The caged bird sings with a fearful trill
Of things unknown but longed for still
And his tune is heard on the distant hill
For the caged bird sings of freedom.*

*The free bird thinks of another breeze
And the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
And the fat worms waiting on the dawn-bright lawn
And he names the sky his own.*

*But the caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
His shadow shouts on the nightmare scream
His wings are clipped and his feet are tied
So he opens his throat to sing.*

*The caged bird sings with a fearful trill
Of things unknown but longed for still
And his tune is heard on the distant hill
For the caged bird sings of freedom.*

Silent reflection

Let us pray ...

Leader: O Lord our Sovereign

*Pilgrim: **Lead us to Your light and goodness. Amen***

We walk on to the Leper cemetery

Fifth Station: *The Leper Cemetery*

Visible is the southern area of the graveyard with at least one grave outside this area. To the west and north there are rows of graves under myrtle & wattle trees. The leprosarium graveyard may have once extended to the Maximum Security Prison because human bones were dug up there in the 1960's & 1970's.

Theme – DIVERSITY

Reading 5: St Luke 9: 46-48

⁴⁶ An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. ⁴⁷ Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and made him stand beside him. ⁴⁸ Then he said to them, Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all - he is the greatest.

Silence

Reflection:

Diversity is at the very heart of God's divine self and being. God's self revelation is expressed most fully in diversity and difference. There are few possibilities for growth, challenge and enthusiasm for life in the stubborn insistence on sameness and exclusivity. Creative Godliness is

expressed in difference: male - female; white – black; gay – straight; tall – short; rough – smooth; lake – desert; tree – grass; opposite – alongside; there – here. To perceive the breadth, length, depth and height of the divine nature, involves embarking on the journey of setting aside our conditioning which makes us fear diversity. Embracing difference is an invitation to discover the God who includes the Moabitess & the Samaritan, poor Lazarus & rich Joseph of Aramathea! It is the journey of enrichment and celebration rather than of tolerance.

Silent reflection

Let us pray ...

Leader: O Lord our Sovereign

*Pilgrim: **Lead us to Your light and goodness. Amen***

We walk on to Sobukwe House

Sixth Station: *The Sobukwe House*

Robert Sobukwe, the leader of the PAC, was held in solitary confinement here. He was not allowed to communicate with anyone including his warders. Sobukwe used various gestures to communicate symbolically with other prisoners like clenched fists full of sand, holding them aloft and opening his fingers so that the soil fell to ground indicating that the land belongs to the people.

Theme – LAND

Reading 6: Isaiah 61: 8-11

⁸For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹For as the soil makes the young plant come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

Silence

Reflection:

Land is a tangible asset, a physical commodity. It is where humans come from and to it, humans return. It sustains, enriches, clothes, houses and challenges those who live on it. Its yield can spark disputes, feed nations and build cities. It can invite us to live in perfect harmony with it and it can be harsh and unrelenting to plant, animal and human. It reminds us of our dependence and

interconnectedness. It reminds us that we are stewards and custodians, not masters over it – we are called to co-operation and humility for the sake of generations yet unborn.

Let us pray ...

Leader: O Lord our Sovereign

*Pilgrim: **Lead us to Your light and goodness. Amen***

Seventh Station: *The Limestone Quarry*

Lime was first quarried here during the Dutch colonial period. From 1963 political prisoners from the general section did hard labour here. They were soon replaced by prisoners from the Isolation Block cells of B-Section. The glare of the limestone and the dusty conditions caused permanent damage to prisoners' eyes. Much of the limestone was used to surface the roads giving them their shimmering glare. While leaders were at work here, the blue stone quarry, where rock for building was quarried, was where the rank and file prisoners worked and where the dehumanizing of these men seems to have been committed with alacrity by wardens.

Theme – LABOUR

Reading 7: Isaiah 65: 21-25

²¹ They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. ²³ They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. ²⁴ Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.

²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

Silence

Reflection:

The work of our hands is our response to the grace and strength which we receive as gift – this is “labour which seeks no reward” – and has its origin in gratitude and connectedness. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are at work constantly bringing life, nurturing love, replenishing hope and strengthening the unity of the created order. When work flows from this place, it is like rivers on a parched land. Those who extract labour from others under threat or duress or with the goal to exploit and humiliate, undermine God’s plan for creation and contaminate the fruits of such labour.

Let us pray ...

Leader: O Lord our Sovereign

Pilgrim: Lead us to Your light and goodness. Amen

We say together

***Goodness is stronger than evil
Love is stronger than hate
Light is stronger than darkness
Life is stronger than death
Victory is ours through Him who loves us***

We make our way to the Church of the Good Shepherd

Here we will share in a service of Holy Communion.

There is the opportunity to view the exhibition on Leprosy before joining one of the official tours of the prison.



Church of the Good Shepherd, Robben Island

We value our relationship with the Island authorities and implore you to show due respect to the space and environs of the island which we have been invited to share and enjoy. Please do not leave any refuse behind and do not wander off beyond the areas where we have been allowed to walk by the authorities.



Top (L) Station 1 (fading view); (R) Station 2 (arrival); 2nd row: (L) Station 3 (Kramat); (R) Station 4 (Prison); 3rd Row (L) Station 4 (Mandela's Cell); (R) Station 5 (The Leper Cemetery); Bottom Row: (L) Station 6 (Robert Sobukwe) (R) Station 7 (Limestone Quarry)