

28th September 2020

Rock

**“I waited for the Lord my God,
And patiently did bear;
At length to me he did incline
My voice and cry to hear.**

Bible, from Psalm 40, The Scottish Psalter 1929

I was brought up in a Presbyterian culture where the singing of Psalms was commonplace in worship. So the words of Psalm 40 quoted above, to the evocative tune *Ballerma*, have always been very special to me.

In Jerusalem, I visited the Church of *St Peter in Gallicantu*. “Gallicantu” refers to the cock’s crow in the Gospels’ story of Peter’s three-fold denial of Jesus. According to Christian tradition, the church is the location of the Palace of the High Priest, Caiaphas, where Jesus may well have been held after his arrest at Gethsemane, the present church being built in 1931 on the ruins of an earlier Byzantine and Crusader basilica.

The most moving part of the visit for me was the descent into the caves under the church, down into a pit where Jesus is said to have been held in custody. Though there are now stairs for the pilgrims, prisoners would have had no such luxury, being lowered and raised by ropes under their arms through a small hole in the top of this most oppressive of prisons. And in the depths of that pit, I sang the second verse of Psalm 40:

*He took me from the fearful pit
And from the miry clay,
And on a rock he set my feet
Establishing my way.”*

Later, a Palestinian Christian told us of his imprisonment by Israeli authorities, when, in the face of oppression of his faith and his people, he too used the words of the Psalmist, knowing that his people would one day stand on a rock, free from oppression, hatred and suffering.

Where are the pits into which people are still thrown by the world’s prejudices and judgements? And where are the rocks on which they need to stand once more, establishing their way to justice and peace?

A prayer for today

Lord, I wait patiently for you. Will you hear my voice and cry? Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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