

Occasion: Lent 1C, Priory 9.45 Sung Eucharist

Propers: Principal Service: Deuteronomy 26.1-11; Romans 10.8b-13; Luke 4.1-13

Preacher: FrDarryl Jordan

Then you, together with the Levites and the **aliens** who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sometimes the best surprises happen between the covers. The front and back cover I should say. For starters, I found the books quite by surprise. I went into our Christchurch library to return a book. I walked over to the science fiction section to see if anything caught my fancy. Seeing nothing fancy I was on my way out the door empty handed when I noticed a special display for Holocaust Memorial Day. Now, I hadn't planned on checking out anything to make me even more gloomy and grumpy than usual. Reading online news media about the whole state of Christ's Church and the world is quite sufficient intake to stop me feeling inordinately happy. But God sometimes has other plans.

I checked out two in the end. One, published in 2006, quickly became a bestseller. [*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne](#) is about an encounter between a Nazi concentration camp commandant's son and a prisoner of the same age. I won't say any more. You really ought to read the book or see the film that's based on it. The other book, published just **last** year, was much closer to home: [*The J Word* by Andrew Sanger](#). It's set in modern Golders Green, London and Christchurch, Dorset oddly enough. It's the story of a nonpractising, nonbelieving Jew who finds his religion through a brush with anti-Semitism **in his** – say it isn't so! - native England. The author had this to say on his [blog](#).

*The dilemmas of British Jews are hardly known - especially in America. For sure, the issues are different. American Jews are just one of the ingredients of a society trying to fuse its elements into a single nation ('under God'). Yet in America, it's not usually necessary to keep one's Jewishness a secret. In *The J-Word*, the main character, Jack Silver, is almost pathologically determined to be 'English', not 'Jewish'.*

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Hopefully Jack's desire for justice, his hunt for the antisemitic thugs [who attacked him in London], his encounter with them - and with his own childhood memories, and the eventual realisations about his identity, will strike a chord with American as much as with British readers.

It certainly struck a chord with this American who, like the Jewish protagonist Jack Silver, isn't ethnically English and spends a lot of time trying to fit into a place where not everyone is keen on his presence. It even happens here in Christchurch. Say it isn't so! Last summer I spoke with two different groups of Germans students from local language schools who'd been verbally or physically assaulted by youth gangs - right here in **this** borough. Their translators felt it was due to their foreign accents, and therefore seemed especially **comfortable** with me. They also appreciated me telling them the name of our miraculous beam of the Carpenter in German: *Das Wunder Strahl des Zimmermann*.

And those sort of encounters are exactly why I thought it was God's doing: both finding those books about anti-Semitism and getting to preach this service, because the theme of our first two readings is accepting people into the community regardless of their ethnicity or religious pedigree. And let me start off by saying we Texans are hardly immune from bigotry. As an Anglo Texan I know there are tensions with Latino Texans. And before discovering in my twenties that intelligent and genteel faith known as Anglicanism, as an adolescent Anglo Texan fundamentalist Protestant, anti-Catholicism wasn't just tolerated: it was expected. Say it isn't so! Well, thank God at least I outgrew it.

The aliens in our first reading from Deuteronomy were the UK cultural equivalent to residents with indefinite leave to remain and those on visas. Ethnic Hebrews were reminded that they too were once migrant workers in Egypt and that their ancestor Abraham was a nomad: a wandering Aramean. Perhaps today's equivalent would be a Traveller, or a migrant worker on a minister of religion visa.

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In the Epistle reading from Romans chapter 10, reader and hearer are reminded that in God's eyes, Jews and all other ethnic groups are saved by assent to the Apostles' preaching. Jews and other ethnic groups? That's accurate, actually. The Greek word St Paul used here and is usually translated 'Gentiles' is 'ἔθνεσιν'. In the Greek Old Testament it's used for foreign **nations**, that is, those who don't practise the Jewish faith. And those are precisely the ethnic groups St Paul evangelised, including of course the Romans.

But we can't join ranks with cessationists. You'll know them by what they call the Jews: Christ-killers, a more offensive epithet even than Papists for Catholics and spics for Latinos. Cessationists believe that God has revoked his original covenant with Israel. You've heard the expression: how odd of God to choose the Jews. Well, that may sound strange but it hasn't changed. Further on, in chapter 11, Paul writes about ethnic Jews, possibly to deter counter-attacks by zealous Roman Christians: 'as regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable'. God never forgets his first love nor fails to show loving-kindness to his covenant people. And lest **we** forget who **they** are, St Paul writes in chapter 11 that in the end, 'all **Israel** will be saved.'

In Luke's temptation story, the Devil offered Jesus an end to personal suffering and a start to political power. Being Son of God, he didn't deserve to suffer. Being King of the Jews, he did deserve to suppress his rivals, those 'other ethnicities', by military might, at least ridding Jerusalem of Roman oppressors. Instead, he chose the road less travelled, the one of suffering but also suffrage. Sometimes it's hard to give others a vote, especially those with a different accent and ethnicity. But like Christians are to Jews, Protestants are to Catholics, and Anglo Texans to Latinos, we might just be the last to arrive. *[wait]* The last thing our elder **brethren** deserve - those blessed both with and **before** us - is bigotry. +In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Deuteronomy 26.1-11

When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, 2you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. 3You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, 'Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.' 4When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, 5you shall make this response before the Lord your God: 'A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. 6When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, 7we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. 8The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; 9and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.' You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. 11Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

Romans 10.8b-13

But what does it say?

'The word is near you,

on your lips and in your heart'

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' 12For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Luke 4.1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3The devil said to him, 'If you are

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the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.’ 4Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone.” ’

5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

6And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’ 8Jesus answered him, ‘It is written,

“Worship the Lord your God,

and serve only him.” ’

9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10for it is written,

“He will command his angels concerning you,

to protect you”,

11and

“On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” ’

12Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” ’ 13When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.