

Richard Aroneau  
High Holidays 2017

### **Welcome Remarks at Adas Yoshuron Erev Rosh Hashanah 2017 (5778)**

L'Shana Tova and welcome. Welcome to the members of our Adas Yoshuron family, to our neighbors and friends, to visitors from near and far away, to those who, passing by, were drawn in by the light and the open door.

Welcome to the lost, to the wanderer, to the skeptical, the curious, the pious, the lonely. In this house, all are welcome.

And a very special and heartfelt 'welcome home' to Rabbi David Freidenreich, Sara, Naomi and Jacob.

We are met here in this sanctuary, where we and those who came before us have gathered on this night for 106 years, embracing family and friends, greeting neighbors, welcoming strangers.

We are here to do teshuvah, tzedakkah, tefillah, and to remember.

Of all the names that this great day carries – Rosh Hashana, Yom Teruah, Yom Harat Olam, Yom Hadin, the one that binds them all is this: Yom Hazikaron, Day of Remembrance. On this night, and for all the Days of Awe that follow, our souls are bound to *zakkah*, to what Lincoln called 'the sacred chords of memory'.

*"Melekh al kol ha'aretz mekadesh yisrael v'yom hazikaron"* --- 'The one who rules over all the earth and sanctifies Israel and the Day of Remembrance'. It's part of the silent *Amidah* for every Rosh Hashanah service. It's the climactic line of tonight's *Kiddush*. It's the last in a torrent of blessings that follow tomorrow morning's *haftarah*.

J.M. Barrie, famous for writing 'all children grow up, except one' also wrote this: 'God gave us memory so that we might have roses in December'.

Two weeks ago, I visited my father in Los Angeles. For him, space is a river whose rapids and eddies he rides through time. One moment we're sitting quietly in this favorite Chinese Restaurant enjoying the lunch special of Orange Chicken and hot and sour soup, the next moment he's a young man whose face has never felt the touch of a razor, lost with his squadron of B-17's in the skies somewhere between the English Channel and the German beast. Another moment and another wave carries him to a small traffic island piled high with the snow we have fashioned into a fat snowman. It's Brooklyn, 1955, and all is well.

In his 96<sup>th</sup> year, my Dad's experience of time and space is different from mine and yours. But not so different.

Standing here on the Bima, a glint of light draws me to the balcony, where a young Ruth Small sits with her cousins wondering when, and whether ever they will be permitted to come downstairs to join the men. And here on my left I see Meredith Dondis, fierce and implacable defender of the seat he's occupied since his Bar Mitzvah in 1936.

Tomorrow morning, when Mike Kosowsky chants the Akedah, how many of us will feel the breath of that angel's voice staying Abraham's hand. The binding of Isaac is never a mere story out of history or myth, but a moment we live again and again just as surely as we ourselves went out of Egypt.

And on Yom Kippur afternoon, which of us will not suffer with Jonah under the heat of that brutal vine-withering sun? Which of us will not feel that God is speaking directly to us when He asks: 'You cared for a vine that grew up in a night and died in a night. Should I not care about Nineveh, that great city...in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left?'

And so it will be when we quicken to Isaiah's magisterial '*This is my fast!*', or, as we stand together for Yizkhor, when those we have loved and lost are found again in our living memory. To me what we sense in this space on these days is God in the waters of time lapping at our feet, crashing over us, carrying us, restoring us, redeeming us.

May we remember on this night that the God who judges us is merciful and gracious, compassionate and forgiving.

May we remember and do all we can to comfort and relieve the suffering and hardship of all those struggling in the aftermath of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, the onslaught of Maria and this morning's devastating earthquake in Mexico.

May our Creator remember us, and have pity on us and shine his countenance upon us.

May we be inscribed in the book of life and granted a year of good health and peace and lovingkindness.

And may we all have roses in December.