**Connor Pilgrimage 2013 – Day 3 by the Very Rev John Mann**

This was a day of 9,000 steps through the old City of Jerusalem (that's when we lost count - well, more or less!) on the flat and up and down, and a two hour queue to get on the Temple Mount - and then we didn't make it.

Under such circumstances you may think that the pilgrims are a little jaded tonight, but these things we brushed off with ease in the sunshine of another beautiful day of very special experiences.

Let me take you first to the Church of St Anne - an ancient church beside the pool of Bethesda - here we enjoyed the amazing acoustics, as we sang out hearts out, and joined pilgrims from all over the world in praising God in song.  It is nearly as good as St Anne's Cathedral in Belfast!

Then we walked the Via Dolorosa; reading and praying we made our way through the busy market, climbing up the narrow streets to Calvary.

The centre of the activity of the day was this tracing of the Passion story, absorbing the distractions and noise and the rest of the sensual and emotional experience, from the smells of the spices on the stalls to the feel of the uneven, ancient flagstones under our feet.  Some people respect the pilgrims' paths, but many more treat our attempt to follow the steps of Christ to the Cross in a completely disinterested way.  I suppose they have seen it all before.  But for us it is special.

We finished the afternoon at the Garden Tomb, where the sun was setting in the moments when we entered the tomb and recited the words that have been inscribed above the entrance: "He is not here, he is risen!"  That for many pilgrims was the theme of the day which we talked about in our evening gathering.

A wonderful day, beyond doubt amongst the most important days of any pilgrimage, but chiefly it is the sharing of the experiences together in the group that make it what it is; the singing, the praying, the laughter and the meals - which are fabulous!

Tomorrow it's the Dead Sea, Masada, Qumran and Jericho.  It will be hot - probably about thirty degrees.  What a happy band of pilgrims we are!