

CORNER STONE

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The Way of Nonviolence, The Way of Fidelity

This is the final sermon presented by Rev. Naim Ateek from Sabeel's annual Solidarity Visit at St. Peter in Gallicantu, Jerusalem on Sunday, April 6, 2003.

Last year we held the opening service of the solidarity visit in the chapel of the Ecce Homo at the Sisters of Zion inside the Old City where according to tradition Pontius Pilate the Roman Governor sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion. For this second solidarity visit, we have chosen this church, St. Peter in Gallicantu, i.e. St. Peter of the cockcrow, because it reminds us, in accordance with the Gospel account, of the final hours of Jesus' life.

We know from the Gospels that it was Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, who betrayed Jesus to the religious authorities. While Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas came with a large number of people with swords and clubs to arrest him. From there they brought him to the house of the High Priest Caiaphas. It was somewhere in this area that Jesus faced the first trial by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court. He was found guilty of blasphemy for which death is the penalty. Since the Jewish court

did not possess the legal authority to implement the death sentence, Jesus had to appear before the Roman court that had the power of execution. Jesus was kept here overnight before he was taken in the morning to Pilate, across the valley, where he was condemned.

The Gospels recount that while the trial of Jesus was going on here, a number of people were assembled outside. The Jerusalem nights can be cold. Some of the people were warming themselves around a fire. Peter followed Jesus from afar. He too was there. One of the servants recognized him and said to him, "I have seen you with Jesus the Nazarene". Peter vehemently denied. This was repeated some time later. Peter insisted repeatedly with swearing and cursing that he did not know Jesus. The rooster crowed and Peter remembered what Jesus told him that before the rooster would crow twice you would deny me three times. He went out and cried bitterly.

When I look at my people these days and the people of

Iraq, it is not resurrection that we are experiencing daily but crucifixion. It is a daily suffering and anguish. Sadly, it is the experience of many oppressed people in the world. Jon Sobrino, the South American theologian has written: "At the center of the Christian faith lies the assertion that Jesus of Nazareth ... died by crucifixion...The cross ... embodies the authentic originality of the Christian faith...In recent times theology...has sought to elaborate a theology of the resurrection, looking to it as the paradigm of triumphant liberty and the joy of living which was lost in the cross. In short, theology has tended to sidestep the task of reflecting on the cross itself"(Christology at the Crossroads, quote by Ched Myers, *Say to this Mountain* p. 211). Ched Myers asks, "Do we ever link the cross of Jesus with the crosses borne by two thirds of humanity in the world of the poor?" Can we see the same forces of evil that conspired to eliminate Jesus conspiring in our world?

In our visit this past week, we have been observing Lent in a unique way. Not necessarily through abstinence from food, but through standing with the oppressed. During the time of the prophet Isaiah, some of the people were addressing God saying, "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" God's answer through Isaiah was clear, "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (Isaiah 58:6-7). Indeed, we did not abstain from food but we stood with our brothers and sisters who are daily walking the way of the cross, and we have committed ourselves to work for their freedom from occupation and oppression. I believe we have been with Jesus. I believe you have met him in the face of the poor and oppressed Palestinians. You have met him in Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahur. You have walked with him in Nablus and Zababdeh. You have seen him in Ramallah and Ain Arik, and you have experienced him on the shores of the Sea of Galilee when he came to us in the Breaking of the Bread. You have walked where Jesus is still walking you have been where Jesus is still present, not so much in the holy sites, though important those may be, but by being with the people of God, the oppressed. Yes, you have been with Jesus. The words of Christ speak to us today, "...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."(Matthew 25:40). Thank you for being with us.

For our reflection this afternoon, I would like us to turn our focus briefly on Jesus' disciples especially Judas and Peter. After all, we all consider ourselves followers of Jesus Christ.

And as the disciples 2000 years ago, we find ourselves confronted with difficult and embarrassing situations that demand of us a response as to who Christ is for us. We, like the disciples of old, feel our weaknesses and fears, and actually take comfort in their weakness, for in the darkest hours for Jesus, they all abandoned him and ran away. More than that, one betrayed him and another denied him.

Everything we do and say must be measured in our relationship with Christ and with those whom Christ represents. I believe that Christ represents the vulnerable people of our world - the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed. Christ stands for every man and woman of sorrows who are condemned by the powers. He stands for the oppressed Iraqis and the oppressed Palestinians. He stands on behalf of everyone whom the powers of this world, whether religious, political, or economic trample and crush. He stands on behalf of the millions of people who, symbolically, are tried illegally at night and are found guilty. They are the forgotten, those who do not count, whose lives are deemed worthless by the powers. Let us look at our modes of response:

The Danger of Betrayal — The Betrayal Mode: Let us remember that Jesus was betrayed by one of his own disciples, Judas. The decision to go to war taken by people who confess to be Christian is a betrayal. Can one who claims to be Christian wage a war that destroys and kills thousands of innocent people? And here in Palestine, whenever one obstructs the implementation of justice, it is betrayal. To betray Christ is to hand him and those whom he represents to the powers to have them destroyed. To betray Christ is to follow personal or national interest and forget the interest of the poor and oppressed. A Christian who allows himself/herself to commit injustice against others has betrayed Christ. Betrayal is a sin against love. What we do to the poor and oppressed is a measure of what we do to Christ. When we take up arms to destroy and kill we are standing within the camp of the enemies of God. Betrayal is the adoption of the way of violence, which Jesus Christ rejected. To follow the way of justice and peace, the way of nonviolence is an important test of true discipleship. When we stray away from it, we have abandoned and strayed away from Christ.

The Danger of Denial — The Denial Mode: When Peter was challenged about his friendship with Jesus, he denied him. "I do not know him". In essence he too placed himself in the camp of the enemy. He was afraid to take a stand. He could not speak the truth. He did not dare to ally himself with Jesus. In this war against Iraq, so many of the countries of the world chose to stand in this camp - the camp of denial. Many of them knew that a war on Iraq was wrong but they

did not dare to oppose the power of the United States. President Bush had already said, "If you are not with us you are against us". Many states could not afford to be against America. They could not afford to lose the financial, economic, and military benefits that can come their way. Peter, the disciple found himself in a deep quandary. On the one hand, he considered himself a close disciple of Jesus, one who promised not to abandon him; and on the other hand, he found himself placed in a situation where he wanted to protect himself. So he simply sided with the enemy.

"Denial has become the fundamental way that we as individuals and as a people respond to difficult realities...the story of Peter's denial asks disciples to face up to the ways in which we deny the suffering Christ who is present in the world. Where have I seen the Christ and pretended that I did not know him (Myers p.198)? I believe that many Christians in the West today live in denial vis-à-vis the war on Iraq. They try to rationalize it by parroting what the powers say about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction that must be destroyed; the threat that Saddam poses to the United States and Britain; and the need to change the regime in order to give the Iraqis freedom and democracy; and so on. The American Administration lives in denial, when as it devastates Iraq, it calls it "Operation Freedom". Many people live in denial of the true motives behind this war and the conflict over Palestine. They need to wake up. They need to see the evil of injustice in our world, exploitation, domination, suppression, hegemony, and the humiliation and dehumanization of many human beings. Will they wake up when they see the devastated country of Iraq and the loss of so many human lives? When will they wake up and see the crushing of justice and peace in Palestine?

Such questions do not only apply to the war. As followers of Christ, we need to continuously ask ourselves, when have I denied Christ by not standing for what is right? When have I denied Christ because I was afraid to speak the truth? "When have I broken faith with the Human One [Christ] to save face, to stay safe, to guard my own life" (Myers p.198)?

There is Another Way —The Way of Faithfulness: There is another way for us, the way of faithful discipleship. We know for sure that it is not the way of betrayal nor is it the way of denial. Even before we say this we must emphasize, to begin with, that Christ's way is certainly not the way of empire. It is not the way of the powers. Christ is not an army general who goes to war to destroy his enemies. Christ's way is not the way of violence and armed resistance. Christ's way is the way of the cross. It is the way of nonviolence. It is the way of love and compassion. It is the way of justice and truth. It is the way of peace and reconciliation. It is the

way of healing and forgiveness.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer faced a problem in the 1930's in his native Germany. He saw the Reich Church holding out an image of Christ "as a Germanic conqueror, someone who rooted out his enemies and destroyed them mercilessly. To Dietrich, this was a pagan image. He instead went back to the Incarnation, in which God became man in order to reveal who God actually was. In other words, the Incarnation was to be the basis of the Church's reformed image of God: 'It is the image of one who enters a world of sin and death, who takes upon Himself all the sorrows of humanity, ... and obeys His (God's) will with unswerving devotion in suffering and death, the man born to poverty, the friend of publicans and sinners, the man of sorrows.... The image of God is the image of Christ crucified'" (The Cost of Discipleship, pp. 115-116).

The crucified Christ is the one who sacrifices himself for others, the one who lays down his life in order give others salvation and freedom. He is the Christ who extends his love and mercy to all. His symbol is not the sword but a lamb slain for the sins of the whole world. Christ's way is the way of the cross and it leads to life, resurrection, and victory.

I am certain that as disciples and followers of Christ we have rejected the way of empire. However, there are other dangers that continuously confront us - those of betrayal or denial and the challenge to remain faithful. Most of us vacillate between denial and fidelity. It is wonderful that when we fall there are roosters that can crow and bring us back to faithfulness. It is wonderful when we can cry bitterly and return to the love and service of Christ.

I hope that now in this service we renew our commitment to Christ by pledging to work for peace based on justice and compassion for all. As you return home, go with God's blessing and the determination to continue to walk the way, the Sabeel of faithful witness. Amen.

Rev. Naim Ateek is the director of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center.

A Prayer

Almighty God, grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression. And strengthen us to work for justice and peace in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your name. Amen.



Easter Reflection

by Hilary Rantisi

As I sit to write these Easter reflections, news images from the past few days come back to haunt me and remind me of so much pain and suffering people all over the world are experiencing. I think of home in Palestine and think of how much suffering people there have endured, and how much they yearn for their day of liberation and peace. I think of them especially at this time, as we prepare for Passion Week and Easter. In Arabic, the week leading up to Easter Sunday is called the "Week of Pain." In my reflection, I want to share some of the Palestinian Christian traditions at Easter.

It was not until I lived in the U.S. that I realized how differently Easter is celebrated in Palestine. In Palestine, like most Arab countries with a Christian population, Easter is considered the most important of Christian holy days. In fact, it is referred to as the "Big Feast" (Al-Eid Al-Kabir - in Arabic) while Christmas is known as the "Little Feast" (Al-Eid Al-Saghir).

Although I grew up in an Episcopal family and church tradition (both my father and maternal grandfather were Anglican pastors), at Easter, the Orthodox churches always seemed more festive. In fact, due to the different liturgical calendars of both the Eastern Orthodox and Western Churches in Palestine, Easter ends up being celebrated twice a year, often only one month apart; and sometimes together on leap years as the two calendars converge. This has meant that part of the Orthodox Christian tradition during Easter is part of the experience of Western denominations, and is celebrated by all Christians in Palestine.

The Saturday before Easter Sunday is the climax of Holy Week in Palestine. In Arabic, Sabt Al-Nur (literally, "Saturday of Light") is an Orthodox tradition that marks the end of the Easter fast. Tradition holds that every year on the Saturday prior to Easter, a flame arises from the tomb of Christ at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The miracle of the flame is celebrated by lighting candles from this flame in Jerusalem and carrying it from one town and village to another. By the time this flame reached Ramallah, where I lived, crowds of people would have gathered in the town center to welcome it. At the first sight of it, people would start yelling, "Christ is risen" (Al-Massih Qam - in Arabic). By this, the whole town is transformed as various Boy Scout troupes from towns and villages around Ramallah parade in the streets in full uniform, drums, banners and flags flying. They all march towards the Greek Orthodox church where a church service takes place.

Saturday of Light always seemed important to me, not so much for the theology or its spiritual aspect, although

that was important, but for its roots in local culture and tradition that grew up around it. This was an exciting time for me as a child because of all the fan-fair, the marches and air of celebration. It also was an ecumenical celebration for all the towns and their surrounding villages because Muslims celebrated alongside their Christian friends announcing the arrival of the light by yelling, "Christ is Risen."

For the most part, due to living under a military occupation, the festivities seemed to end there. As the marching bands and crowds of people blocking the streets of Ramallah dispersed after the church service, their place was taken by demonstrations against the occupation. More often than not, the Israeli army, who patrolled the streets, would start arresting people and shooting at the crowds. By the time Easter Sunday came about the town would often have been placed under curfew.

Despite the political tensions that often accompanied Easter in Palestine, families celebrated in their homes by having a special meal. Later in the day, people would visit each other to wish one another a happy Easter. A common exchange would be for one to say, "Al-Masih Qam" - Christ has risen to which the reply is, "Haqan Qam" - he has risen indeed. Special Easter cookies were made with dates and nuts, colored Easter eggs, chocolate and coffee, and mint or aniseed liqueur, were all part of the routine. Easter Sunday and the following two days were often the busiest of the entire week. Visitors would come to our house, both relatives and friends, Christians and Muslims to greet us and acknowledge the holy day. Christians make reciprocal visits during the end of Ramadan feast for Muslims.

To this day, the most memorable "Saturday of Light" experience for me was from Easter 1997. It is memorable because it was the first time I had experienced the celebration without the Israeli army watching from the roof tops and their patrol jeeps. By 1997, the Israeli army had withdrawn from the center of the city and the city was jubilant to be free at least temporarily from the rule of the military oppressor. Today, the Israeli army is back in the center of Ramallah,

in tanks and patrol jeeps.

There isn't much jubilation this year, as much of the town has experienced so much loss, destruction and devastation in the last two and one-half years. I wonder how the flame will ever make it to Ramallah on Sabt Al-Nur through all the check points? Will the scout groups from surrounding villages be allowed to come through the checkpoints surrounding the town carrying their musical instruments and proudly dressed in their uniforms?

Today, Palestinians feel that not only are their religious, cultural, and spiritual celebrations under attack but their whole existence as well. In fact, many Palestinian Christians refer to their experience of living under occupation and the suffering they endure as "walking the Via Dolorosa" or the Way of the Cross. However, this Way of the Cross is not confined to Easter week, but is year long and has been going for many years. Sabeel, where I used to work for before coming to the US, leads what they call the "Contemporary Way of the Cross." This procession around Jerusalem and parts of the Occupied Territories offers the opportunity for Western Christian pilgrims and visitors to join Palestinians for an afternoon of making the modern stations of the cross, the on-going suffering that Palestinians endure under occupation, along with biblical and spiritual reflection. The stations of suffering that are visited include: checkpoints, refugee camps, sites of demolished homes, and places of violence. By sharing these experiences with visitors, Palestinians share their story of suffering in the hope that it will end soon.

Today, Palestinians are still walking the Way of the Cross, and anxiously awaiting the day of resurrection, the day the stone that blocks the tomb of occupation, is rolled away.

Please pray and remember this Easter Season all those who continue to walk the Way of the Cross, and pray for their day of resurrection.

Hilary Rantisi is former staff of Sabeel currently living in Boston.

A Road Map to Nowhere

Or: Much Ado About Nothing

by Uri Avnery

This could have been an important document, IF.

IF all the parties really wanted to achieve a fair compromise.

IF Sharon and Co. were really prepared to give back the occupied territories and dismantle the settlements.

IF the Americans were willing to exert serious pressure on Israel.

IF there were a president in Washington like Dwight Eisenhower, who did not give a damn about Jewish votes and donations.

IF George Bush were convinced that the Road Map serves his interests, instead of being a bone to throw to his British poodle.

IF Tony Blair thought that it serves his interests, instead of being a crumb to throw to his domestic rivals.

IF the United Nations had any real power.

IF Europe had any real power.

IF Russia had any real power.

IF my grandmother had wheels.

All these IFs belong to an imaginary world. Therefore, nothing will come from all the talking about this document. The embryo is dead in the womb of its mother, the Quartet.

Uri Avnery is the founder of Gush Shalom, an Israeli peace group. The continuation of this essay is available on their web site.

Peace

Anybody who writes an article about Peace will want to "fix it," to have his or her contribution be just the thing that brings an end to strife, and ushers in a life full of opportunity, health, compassion, forgiveness and joy. I am no exception to this longing. I have written about Peace every day for more than thirty years, and I would like to share just a few of the things that I have learned.

The very most important thing I know is that Peace is everywhere on this planet. Peace is as ever present as oxygen. Peace is the underpaint of this planet, something our spirit breathes with or without our conscious knowing. There is no time when Peace is not accessible; yet we are so ignorant of this reality, so oblivious to the pervasiveness of Peace, that we take virtually no advantage of it and its power to transform our individual and communal lives.

The search for Peace is a classic story retold: Endless looking for what was never lost, misplaced or escaped. As absurd as it sounds, as unfamiliar as it seems, there is no such thing as the absence of Peace. There is such a thing, however, as an almost total absence of knowledge or understanding of its presence.

Second thing. Peace is a resource for healthy living, not the goal of healthy living. The qualities that a human being develops when he or she begins to access Peace are the qualities without which no life of freedom and love and justice and choice can be achieved or sustained.

Article

Jane Lee Wolfe

Human beings are severely focused on their physical lives. The scramble for food, clothing and shelter occupies all or time, and we will kill and oppress and trample each other mercilessly in order to achieve these aims. There is nothing wrong with the aims. What is wrong is the means we use to achieve them, means that are the result of our severely underdeveloped humanity, our deadly single focus.

The tragedy is that these means will never change until we develop the dimension of our lives that feeds on Peace, that lives and breathes it. We may be able, in good times, to modify or regulate our behavior somewhat, but we will never transform life until we expand ourselves to access Peace regularly and intentionally. We will repeat our dishonorable, abusive, frantic behavior, with random bits of easier times thrown in here and there; but these will have as little sustainability as a winning streak at a gaming table.

Third thing. Developing our humanity so that we access Peace is not difficult. You do not even have to believe it is possible. At some point you have to take a chance that it is possible, that's all. You can do this by saying "I am breathing Peace," or "I am accessing Peace" (something like that), and for a second or two let the back of your body breathe in and out. Seems weird maybe, but done a few times a day, it begins to have effect. You develop a sense of your life expanding, and it is. Your humanity is enlarging, and new qualities of character emerge and develop.

Four: Will this feed your family? Absolutely not. Will it stop greedy violent people from ruining your life? No. If you are a greedy, violent person, will accessing Peace put the breaks on your aggression? Yes. If aggression works for you, why should you bother? There are good answers to this question, but they are difficult to communicate in a compelling way.

Developing your humanity by accessing Peace changes the way you go about feeding, clothing and sheltering yourself, your family and your community. It does this because it changes you. Possibilities expand, greed diminishes, and aggression seems less of an option for solving life problems.

All of us must learn that Peace is real and present always, that Peace is a tool for transformation, that Peace is accessible with ease. People are starving, people are hurt, people have little to hope for, people abuse each other endlessly. Living severely underdeveloped human lives that focus exclusively on our physical well-being has caused this chronic situation. No amount of tinkering with this single-focus existence will change life for the human race for any sustainable length of time.

Only if we expand into our full humanity by accessing the Peace that envelops this planet more permanently than oxygen will our lives change. Will it be tomorrow? I hope so, but I don't know. Is it worth it? I can only answer for myself: I believe the antidote to human brutality, my own and others, is in the accessing of Peace and the expansion of what it means to be human. Because I know that accessing Peace is easy, I know that I will give it a try, and I think others will, too. That's the best that I can do; and I believe my best will be enough.

Jane Lee Wolfe is the current president of the World Young Women's Christian Association.

By the Waters Of Babylon

by Anne Montgomery

A Christian calendar in Baghdad pictures two streams flowing from the side of the risen Christ. The blood and water described in John's Gospel have become Tigris and Euphrates, the life-giving waters of Mesopotamia. If we follow the Tigris upstream from the Gulf to Mosul, however, other images surface of waters polluted and the innocent sacrificed, as does the question: "Where now is the hope of new life?"

The director of Mosul's maternity hospital barely suppresses her anger as she repeats the first question of new mothers: not: "Is it a boy or girl?" but: "Is my baby whole?" She shows whole albums of dead newborns; parts of bodies fused; arms, legs, eyes missing; disfigured in every way; the effect of depleted uranium U.S. missiles sowed in air and soil 12 years ago. And the rivers carry its pollution, mixed with untreated sewage, to further poison the land people call the original garden of Eden.

Upstream, several years before, I visited a Baghdad pediatric hospital on Christmas day with gifts of fuzzy

animals for the leukemia wards. In one were modern mothers-of-sorrow. On either side of a young boy, only his eyes moving, sat mother and grandmother mourning and weeping. I wondered if he was conscious of their tears and afraid. Opposite his bed a very young mother sat, cradling a tiny baby, one eye ballooning from the force of the cancer behind. The infant cried and fretted, unable to enjoy the toy the mother graciously accepted, her lovely face dignified and serene. To me she will always be Miriam, the Madonna. As I left the ward, her smile followed.

A day earlier we had brought schoolchildren and two of our favorite shoeshine boys to reenact the Christmas story before a maternity hospital damaged in the Ramadan bombing. Three doctors became Magi while the children sang in Arabic "We'll walk hand-in-hand" in front of the tent-manger. Their joy and determination to keep singing was a sign of hope, contrasting with other scenes of ragged war orphans clinging to taxis to beg for food or money.

Farther upstream, in the twin cities of Mosul and Nineveh, the Tigris flows strong and the crowded streets are now bustling. But in the summer of 1991 they had



been dark and sewage ran in the rubble of one of Mosul's poorest neighborhoods. There we visited the father and only survivor of a large family whose home had been bombed on the birthday of his four-year-old. He, a Moslem, quoted to us from the Sermon on the Mount in his distress that Christians could so indiscriminately kill the innocent.

Two years later we learned that he had remarried and was expecting a new birth. As so many Iraqis say, "We have been bombed often but we must go on living." Now the lights are on and the hospitals cleaner and better equipped, but, not far under the surface, the embargo undermines the determination to heal and grow strong. The lack of crucial medicines for leukemia and other diseases cause needless deaths, while broken parts and contracts "on hold" by the sanctions committee affect the whole infrastructure.

And what of the psychological, moral, and spiritual infrastructure from which flow the springs of real life and hope? One woman said that, in the year of the Gulf War, the first word of her newborn was not

"mother" or "father" but "bomb." What of this child and so many who are now in their early teens, many malnourished, developmentally damaged, demoralized and angry, learning from teachers poorly educated themselves as a result of middle-class flight? In this family-oriented culture many children go to the streets to work or beg or worse. Yet Christian churches as well as Mosques are crowded with young and old while in the cities many young people flock to theology and scripture classes. And, across the landscape, bridges, roads, and houses, built from local materials, show the determination to build yet another new life in the cradle of civilization.

Ezekiel's vision of living creatures by the river of Babylon reflects the winged beasts inscribed on the walls of that city as well as the stone guardians at the ancient gates of Nineveh. The cherubim, light-bearing messengers of God, promise that hearts of flesh will replace those of stone. We can hope; we can pray, that a new spirit will renew, not only this land and people, but all of us that we may drink together from the springs of peace and justice.

Anne Montgomery is a member of the Christian Peacemaker Team in Hebron. She wrote this piece about a team visit to Iraq that took place before the current war.

13th Day of Bombing 2003

At the foot of the mount of Beatitudes in Tabgha, 40 of our Sabeel Solidarity Visit were celebrating a communion service. As we were singing the prayer of St. Francis to make us a channel of his peace, a loud and heavy noise was all over the skies. You could not see the military planes, but they penetrated our bodies.

Looking out at the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus walked on the water towards Peter and the others in the boat, my mind was going in all directions. Where were the Israelis or American planes flying? To protect us from Scud missiles? To bomb Baghdad? To bomb our friends in Nablus whom we visited yesterday?

What should we do? Give thanks for the protection? Call the people on our cell phones and tell them to run?

The symbols and reality of war and peace were one.

Slowly, the prayer and song in our hearts rose up and the noise of war was quieted. From the West Bank to Iraq may the words of Jesus "Be not afraid" be their song.

- Tom Samway

Solidarity Visit

Construction Israel Style

An obscene gash of ochre
scratched through
verdant green of spring
by yellow beasts
obeying blindly

the blinded conqueror's will.
Barbed wire, dirt, electric shock,
the foot prints of a wall of separation
the deconstruction of a people
rightful owners of the land.

Daphne Grimes

Nablus 2003

- Daphne Grimes



Black holes and rubble,
inside our houses
old and new
are flattened, pock-marked.
Soft interiors where once
a family gathered
hang like gutted creatures,
entrails spilling out.
From a broken window
A blue shirt flutters,
brave testimony
to a shattered life
that still, somehow, hold on.

Solidarity Reflection

Psalm 30:5. "Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning".

Having lived in this beautiful land of Palestine for over 37 years and now at the crossroads of my life intending to return to my original home of England shortly, I found the Sabeel Solidarity Visit both very sad and very heartening.

To see Bethlehem like a ghost city with most of the stores closed, Manger Square deserted, people mourning the loss of their children killed by Israeli snipers, the Paradise Hotel bombed to a shell, the total lack of tourists and worst of all the building of an 'Apartheid' wall which will separate citizens from their businesses,

Palestinian Faces

As we traveled from Jerusalem to the Galilee calling at Nablus, Zababdeh and many towns and villages I was struck afresh by the Palestinian faces and of course what they face! Town after town there were groups of men mostly sitting or standing outside their empty shops gathered together to chat on even more likely to grieve. With no work, no hope, no visitors. How amazing then when they looked up and saw a Palestinian coach passing by full of waving foreigners. The look of shock which covered their faces was a sight to behold.

The surprise for me after all we have heard and seen is that the Palestinian people are not afraid of the stranger. We were accepted and welcomed as we walked through the broken Nablus, laughed with as we joined the throng in the narrow streets. The shock and astonishment when Palestinians sees Sabeel in Action.

Irene

Beit Sahour Reflection

I notice a tiny yellow flower, fringed by deep green leaves, triumphantly sprouting out of the middle of a huge rock.

A dozen of us from the April Solidarity Visit are in Beit Sahour to see the Greek Orthodox housing project. This is a group of new apartments, some still under construction, for young families. They are threatened with demolition because they are now defined as too close to the about-to-be erected Wall.

We sense the anger and frustration, mingled with the ever-present sorrow felt throughout Palestine. How do people keep going? How do they live their lives, raise their children, keep their sanity among so much deprivation and uncertainty and in the face of unrelenting military force?

Through many encounters during the Solidarity Visit, I came to understand that the Palestinian community is characterized by hardiness, just like the little flower, and resiliency nourished by faith.

The image from Beit Sahour haunts my thoughts. If God's creation can support a flower growing out of a boulder, there must be hope that commitment to peace can grow, even in hardened hearts in the Land we call Holy.

Ann Nichols

children from their schools and split families in half was so devastatingly depressing to me that I literally wept when we reached the Grotto of the Nativity. Some Catholic nuns, the Emmanuel Sisters, will be on the opposite side of the wall to the people they minister to, and one man who has a family grocery business will be living on the opposite side of the wall to his shop, which is now only across the street.

Yet the very next day, our tour took us to Nablus where the first place we visited was Jacob's well. Here, after waiting for

almost 50 years there is now a magnificent church newly built and almost complete, where the priest, Father Yousef, is also the artist of the beautiful stained glass windows and the architect. This time I wept for joy to see such an edifice being built to God's Glory. After two murders of clergy persons by the Israeli settlers, it is a pure miracle. As we drank from the cool fresh water which Jesus drank from, we remembered His eternal words "...whoever drinks of this water that I shall give him will never thirst..." John 4:14.

Patricia Rantisi

S n a p s h o t s

International Friends of Sabeel (IFOS) have been very active these past months in a number of areas. All chapters have been active in organizing or participating in demonstrations against a war on Iraq. Sabeel greatly appreciates the active response of our friends around the world.

FOS-U.K: has been working hard concentrating their efforts on demonstrations, hosting a number of lectures and book launches by friends such as Rev Don Wagner, Dr. Marc Ellis, and The Most Rev. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury.

FOS-NA: In the United States conferences were organized in Pasadena, California and Detroit, Michigan. They will be mailing out for Lent a 63-page booklet by Phyllis Bennis, a noted Jewish theologian, on the Israeli military occupation. FOS-NA also sponsored a documentary film by Ed Gaffney entitled "Holy Land: Common Ground." They have also been successful in starting new regional chapters in Hawaii, Florida, Utah, and Washington. Canadian Friends of Sabeel are also working to increase the number of

regional chapters to include Vancouver and Calgary. CFOS is also working on getting the video "Stuck with the Truth" onto local cable stations.

FOSS: Scandinavia has been focusing on advocacy and demonstrations. In addition, the FOSS coordinator has been training the Swedish members of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program that is sponsored by World Council of Churches. The Accompaniers will be working in areas throughout the West Bank and Gaza for a period of three months.

FOS-AU: Australia is a newly formed chapter of IFOS scheduled to hold its first official meeting/event in February 2003. If you are interested in becoming a member please contact Ray who info is on the back of the Cornerstone.

If you are interested in advocating for justice and peace, and supporting the ministry of Sabeel by becoming a part of our international friends, please contact one of the coordinators listed on the back cover of Cornerstone or the Jerusalem office at Friends@sabeel.org.

Now Available

Sabeel is producing an informative bulletin for use in church bulletins, bulletin boards, or general circulation by email. These bulletins contain a short article about a time-relevant topic, advocacy ideas, photos, and quotes or prayers for reflection.

If you would like to receive these bi-monthly publications by email please contact **friends@sabeel.org** and we will add you to our list.

Snapshots of our Activities

Since the beginning of 2003, most of Sabeel's regular activities, (like that of many organizations around the world) have been largely shaped and altered by a possible war against Iraq. Through prayers, statements, discussion groups, educational trips and bible studies, both the local and international departments of Sabeel focused on issues of faith and justice, real democracy, false powers, might versus right, integrity, double standards, despair and hope.

Retreat and Visioning

Before embarking on any activities, the Sabeel staff held a 24- hour retreat/visioning at the monastery of the St. Joseph Sisters in Abu Gosh on January 15/16, 2003. The first afternoon was spent in spiritual preparation through Bible study and reflection led by Naim Ateek. The second day was a combination of evaluation and planning. Sabeel invited some of their local partners to facilitate the assessment of the ministry and share in the visioning. To Alain Weaver and Dorothy Jean Weaver, we extend our thanks. Rejuvenated and filled with courage and determination Sabeel set forth to translate the plans into programs.

Community Building

Ecumenical Worship Service: Sabeel and several CROs

(Church Related Organizations) organized an Ecumenical Worship Service at St. Stephen's (Dominican) Church on February 19, 2003 to join in prayers for "Peace for Iraq and the Middle East." Father Frans Bouwen from the Justice and Peace Commission, and The Rev. Naim Ateek led the service at which Patriarch Michel Sabbah gave the invocation and Bishop Munib Younan the sermon. As



prayers were recited in several languages, children joined their voices for God's mercy and peace on this region.

Lent Program

Father Marwan Di'des, the Rev. Naim Ateek and Father Pakrad Bourjikian presented three challenging interpretations of "The Road to Resurrection", the theme for this year's lent. Needless to say that the discussion stemmed from the fear of an imminent war and its implications, but each priest encouraged the audience to brave the personal or communal difficulties and storms through faith in the cross that leads to resurrection.

Lectures

Dr. Farid Esack, a South African Muslim professor of religious studies spoke to a Jerusalem audience about "South African Reflections on Marginalization and Victimhood." on March 7, 2003. Dr.

Esack is currently working on a comparative study between forms of

oppressive measures used in South Africa and Israel that will be entitled "Beyond Victimhood."

Dorothy Jean Weaver, a professor of New Testament at Eastern Mennonite University, in a

workshop at Sabeel shared her analysis of the



Roman Characters of the Gospel of Matthew. She looked at the underlying "second layer" of the apparently powerful but complex characters of the Roman soldier, centurion, governor, and Pilate's wife. Andries van Aarde from South Africa and Dean Ross Jones responded to her paper entitled "Thus you will know them by their fruits".

The Palestinian Constitution

Sabeel invited a small team of lawyers and human rights organizations to study, critique and suggest amendments to the draft Palestinian Constitution before its final reading. Suggestions were forwarded to the Palestinian Authority in a letter that invited them to be true to Palestinian Declaration of Independence and the people's aspirations of a true democratic, pluralistic state.

Speakers Training and Non-violence

The graduates of the Speakers Training course met for a strategizing session and decided to get additional training in the concept of non-violence. As a result, Sabeel is holding a 6 session workshop in the history of non-violence as experienced in other countries.



Clergy Meetings

On January 10 and February 18, the clergy gatherings were held at the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem, but no West Bank priests could attend. Therefore, in March, the meeting took place at the Latin School in Jericho. Father Francois Shamieh hosted priests and representatives of the Greek Orthodox, Coptic and Syrian Churches, who informed the Jerusalem clergy about the difficulties facing Jericho, deprived of tourism and income. The priests also paid their respects and expressed condolences to the family of the late Sheik Jamal, the Mufti of Jericho. The Clergy also assisted at the Ecumenical Worship Service for "Peace for Iraq and the Middle East" and participated in events during the International Solidarity Visit.

Women's Events

The visit of two Mennonite feminist theologians in the first two months of the year could not be ignored by the Women's department at Sabeel. Both Patti Shelley and Dorothy Jean Weaver brought a breath of hope and comfort amidst the agony of the suffering women. On January 29, Patti Shelley, a close friend of Sabeel and Palestinian women had a heart to heart talk. Expressions of fear, anger and frustration at the injustices in the world, Iraq and Palestine rose to the surface as well as more personal concerns for their children, and the challenge to raise hope in a desperate situation. Patti listened with compassion, and saluted the women's endurance against structural violence. She shared her own fears, and lifted up everyone's pleas in hymns, and prayers to the One who promised: "Do not fear".

On February 13, Dorothy Jean led a Bible study on the "False Powers" based on the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter Two. An interactive lesson shared by teacher and students in deep reflection that filled the participants with determination to strive for justice non-violently and to strengthen their faith.

"Together ...we will build"

The second encounter in the series was held in Nazareth on March 14. In contrast to the first meeting that had

more presentations, this program tried to combine spirituality, visits to historical sites and lectures. About 130 women participated. Everyone was welcomed at the YMCA Nazareth by the Nazareth branch of Sabeel and then headed to the Mt. of Precipice, the traditional site of Nazareth's rejection of Jesus Christ. At the top of the mountain, Monsignor Marcuzzo warmly greeted the group as they revived an old tradition when Christians who fasted on that particular day, climbed up the mountain. Prayers and hymns filled the air after which small plates of 'tabbouleh' were passed around to break the fast. The group continued its pilgrimage in Nazareth, with an inspiring talk by Amal Houry, a lawyer, clergy wife, and a legal advisor on working women's rights. Amal exposed the challenges facing women in Christian marriages. The program ended at the synagogue where Jesus proclaimed his mission where Father Elie Kurzum reflected on the book of Luke. A few of the Jerusalem women took time in the afternoon to connect with their relatives not seen for several months. The general consensus was that it had been a blessed day and everybody asked for more such occasions!



Youth

Haya Di'des is the new Youth coordinator at Sabeel. Before launching a program, Haya met with groups in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth to ascertain the needs and interests at such times as this. Her first attempt for a Lenten gathering in Jericho had to be postponed because of the war on Iraq. In March, however, the halls of the YWCA bustled with 85 young people gathered to air their feelings in a workshop led

by Muna Nasser, a special educator and facilitator. Together, the participants tried to define the four components that have an effect on the behavior of youth: family, friends, school and the political arena. Divided into groups, they improvised skits and sketches that brought to the surface hidden anxieties, concerns, and fears.



These are the topics that Sabeel will adopt for the rest of the year. The Rev. Naim Ateek concluded the session by addressing the issues of anger and resentment and the challenge to transform them into positive action.

Visitors

The persistent and courageous travel of groups, delegations and individuals into our region of conflict has been most instrumental in keeping our morale high. We are not forgotten. People still care! Heartfelt thanks to the Sabeel Solidarity Visitors, the Quaker Regional Directors, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Christian Aid, Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAPPI), Linda Ramsden's group, Kernitactie from the Netherlands and the United Church of Canada for their support and solidarity.

News from Nazareth

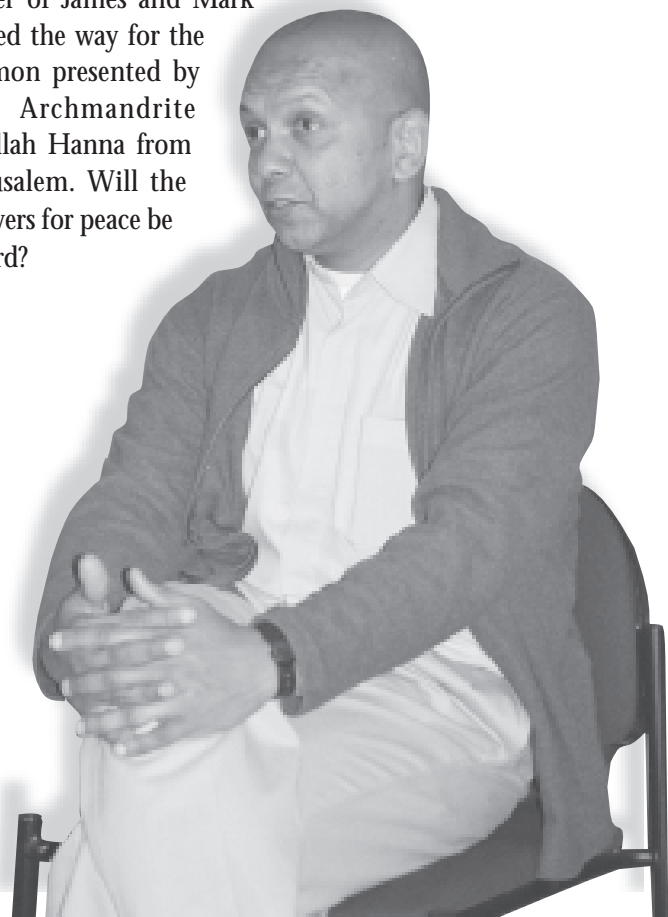
In January, members of the committee, and other young people met with a group of students from the USA to discuss the conditions of Arab Israelis. The focus was on Arab Israeli university students, their fears, goals and aspirations. The meeting encouraged the students to join Sabeel Nazareth as a young adult branch who could develop their own programs in leadership and community-building.

One of the new programs at the Nazareth Branch is the Young Couples program. These couples are probing into their identity as Christians, trying to deepen their understanding of faith and responsibility in an Israeli environment. Questions surface at meetings with spiritual guides such as Father Ibrahim Daoud and the Rev. Naim Ateek.

Retreat/Visioning: On February 22/23, the Sabeel Nazareth Committee and staff along with the Rev. Naim Ateek and Jerusalem staff assessed the work in the Galilee. There is a growing demand to expand the ministry. Father Elias Chacour led the spiritual reflection, encouraging the Galileans to roll up their sleeves and act. Now more than ever, there is a need to witness for Christ in His Land.

Ecumenical Worship Service: On March 30, (Land Day in the Galilee), Sabeel invited people to pray for peace in Iraq and the region at the Salesian Church. Prayers in Arabic, English, French, German, Greek, Italian and Vietnamese were lifted up as hymns were chanted led by the young Abeer Nussair. Readings from Micah, the letter of James and Mark

paved the way for the sermon presented by the Archmandrite Atallah Hanna from Jerusalem. Will the prayers for peace be heard?



Have No Fear ... for I Am with You



This is the opening sermon presented by Cedar Duaybis from Sabeel's annual Solidarity Visit at the Armenian Catholic Church, Jerusalem on Saturday, March 29, 2003.

We thank God, and you are friends for the courage and commitment you have show by coming to us in these most difficult of times.

In this Lenten season, and as we approach Good Friday we lament the option for war that has been taken. We lament the loss of life and unimaginable suffering that this war will bring about. But in the midst of this darkness, let us not lose sight of the dawn of Resurrection.

This is day 10 of the second war of the century. When Sabeel first decided to organize this visit the war in Afghanistan, was raging. We sincerely hoped it would be the last ... Our hearts and prayers are with the people of Iraq and with the families of all the victims. Whatever the outcome of the war, nothing can justify the horrible atrocities that are taking place. Our hearts go out to the children and to all innocent people who had no say in what is going on. God have mercy, and as human beings we ask your forgiveness, we pray that this mad war will end soon. Our hope is that war will not be the pattern for solving problems in the twenty first century and that all conflicts yet unsettled will soon see a just and peaceful end.

Dear friends, Sabeel has so appropriately chosen as its theme for this visit the words that allayed the fears of St. Paul: "Have no fear; go on with your preaching and do not be silenced, for I am with you and no one shall attempt to do you harm and there are many in this city who are my people".

It is obvious from this verse that Paul was in a state of fear and perhaps despair because of the resistance to his preaching that he faced and because of the great evil of that city. God gave no guarantee to Paul that he will meet no more opposition but rather that those who opposed him will not be able to harm or silence him for God was with him. It is true that Paul was a brave and hopeful man, but he was also human and often needed encouragement and consolation. In 1st Corinthians chapter 2 verse 3 he says: "I came to you weak, nervous and shaking with fear." I believe those words very well describe the condition of many people around the world these days but especially the people of this region.

You our friends are with us today to hear our voice and to be our voice when you go back home. By doing so you are giving us justice respect and mercy. You will meet with opposition and some will try to silence you but to speak the truth is our guarantee that God is with us and none shall attempt to do us harm and that we must not be silenced.

Today the world is in the grip of fear, but then has this not always been the case? Fear is a basic human condition, but the fear of the moment always looms bigger than any other. Humanity is united in fear because, as Pope John Paul II so well put it: "This war is a defeat for humanity".

People everywhere have many questions-about the disunited nations, about the European disunion, about the North Atlantic disorganization, and about a beleaguered Arab League.

However, there are a few exceptions... On the eve of the war, the BBC reported that president George W. Bush was "Calm, still cracking jokes and reads the Bible a lot".

Again on the eve of the war, when the whole world was praying for a miracle to stop the war from breaking out, Israel's newly appointed national commentator on the war in Iraq, major general Amos Gilad, called the imminent American strike "a miracle" which would help solve Israel's dire security and economic problems' (The Jerusalem Report March 10, 2003).

From the midst of this fear, a strong voice is emerging. It is the voice of the powerless, the voice of the weak, a voice not backed by weapons of mass-destruction. Yet it is emerging as a super-power that is challenging the only super-power in today's world. It is the voice of public opinion. The voice of people like you and me. The conscience of the world, and it knows what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. It is an Intifada of Humanity against the arrogance of power. It is a voice for justice and peace that can be achieved through peaceful means. As St. Paul came to realize: "Power comes to its full strength in weakness" (2nd Corinthians 12:9).

Let us hope that if war is a defeat for Humanity then this emerging superpower will be a triumph for Humanity. The amazing lesson of this phenomenon is that people can come together across many boundaries and divisions to raise one voice for the sake of Humanity. One voice that says: there is another way. They come from different countries, cultures,

faiths, ethnic backgrounds and social standing. Their voice defies the theory of "the clash of civilizations". It says that when different civilizations or religions encounter each other it could be an encounter of understanding and compassion or it could be a clash of war. Decisions made in fear can only bring temporary and violent solutions and trigger similar reaction, while decisions based on understanding and compassion can get to the root of the problem and achieve long lasting results.

The reassuring voice of love to Paul continues, as the Book of Acts tells us: "And there are many in this city who are my people". You are not alone, my people are in solidarity with you. Solidarity is a practical expression of love. Jesus said: "As I have loved you, so are you to love one another". God's love for the world was manifested through the incarnation of Jesus who came to be in solidarity with the oppressed of this world. His strong and rallying cry was: you are to love one another, to stand with one another against anyone or anything that was destructive and damaging to life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said: "Christianity stand or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness and pride of power and with its plea for the weak". The Palestinian people now more than ever before, need world solidarity. People need protection from the powers that destroy them physically, socially, economically and in every other way.

When Paul heard those words, the book of Acts tells us, he settled down for eighteen months. The meaning here is that he stayed in the city for eighteen months, the longest period that Paul stayed in any one place. But the words "settled down" in the New English Bible, stopped me and I felt inside the need to settle down. Palestinians need this settling down in every sense of the word. We need a safe place of our own to settle down, and this can only happen when there is a just settlement of the Palestine / Israel conflict. We accept a minimum measure of justice in order to make a settlement possible. Only then can we and our neighbours settle down, have peace, and start on the long road to reconciliation.

But my first reaction to the words "settle down" was of something that needed to happen inside where there was fear, anxiety and restlessness. Something that is impossible to achieve when our hearts are filled with fear. In his parting words to his disciples Jesus said: "Set your troubled hearts at rest and banish your fears." Those were the words they most needed to hear. He never promised that the road ahead would be easy, but he put their hearts at rest. They were witnessing to the truth and therefore he was with them and nothing else mattered. Unsettled, is a feeling that all

This is the opening sermon presented by Archbishop Duan Sabero from Sabero on Solidarity Visiting the Armenian Catholic Church in Jerusalem on Saturday, May 29, 2003.

Palestinians, whether they live in the occupied territories, in the refugee camps, inside the State of Israel or in the diaspora, unsettled is a feeling they carry within themselves as a result of all the long decades of oppression and deprivation. What we need most is to settle down inside and trust in Gods words: "Have no fear, for I am with you and no one shall attempt to do you harm". We also need to give our neighbors the same assurance for they too have their fears.

Exactly one year ago, on the twenty eighth of March, the people of Ramallah on the West Bank, lived through great fear during the brutal Israeli incursion into their town. People, and especially children were terrified by the falling rockets, tank fire, helicopter gunships, terrible explosions, the occupation and destruction of their homes. Recently Ramallah has been relatively quiet, but, Juman, my eleven-year-old granddaughter still shows signs of fear and anxiety. She jumps at the slightest sound. When trying to explain her anxiety, she expresses herself very well. "Teita" (grandma) she says: "I am afraid of fear". She has not yet settled down inside.

During this visit you will have the opportunity to draw a good picture of the situation on the ground and you will be hearing the voices of many people involved. The two sides, alone, will not get anywhere. We need an outside party to help. In the past, we put our trust in the United States, the so-called only super-power. Have no fear we were told the United States will be an equal partner. Have no fear, the US will be an honest broker. Have no fear, we are now told, The United States will lay out a road map. We fear it will lead to nowhere... We do not trust anymore and our fears rise.

Dear friends, together, we will not be silenced and there is a lot of opposition along the way, but we believe in one Supreme Power who is with us and who will undertake.

Together, let us humbly embark on the rest of our journey contemplating the words of assurance to Paul: "Have no fear: go on with your preaching and do not be silenced, for I am with you and no one shall attempt to do you harm, and there are many in this city who are my people".

May the peace of God which is beyond our utmost understanding keep guard over our hearts and our thoughts in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Cedar Duaybis is a member of the Sabeel Board Executive and a resident of Ramallah.

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Purpose Statement of Sabeel

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. *Sabeel* strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

For more information on *Friends of Sabeel* groups in your area please contact our International representatives or the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem.



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