

Palm Sunday

“When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples² and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it.³ If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’”⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it,⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?”⁶ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹¹ Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.” Mark 11: 1-11

*“From Olivet they followed
mid an exultant crowd,
the victor palm branch waving,
and chanting clear and loud.
The Lord of earth and heaven
rode on in lowly state,
nor scorned that little children
should on his bidding wait.”*

“Hosanna, Loud Hosanna” vs. 2, by Jeanette Threlfall

As we read this passage of Jesus’s so called “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem we must remember that the true meaning of “Hosanna” is not “a shout of praise or adoration” or “to praise or applaud” as the dictionary currently defines it. At the time Jesus’s entered the city, humbly on a donkey, he was purposely fulfilling the prophesy of Zachariah. (Zach 9:9) The people believed that Jesus had come to be their king, to lead them out of an oppressive system of occupation imposed by the Roman authorities. Those cries of “Hosha-na! Save us now!” are still being shouted today by the people who are now living under the same oppressive systems of occupation imposed by the new Roman authority, the Israeli government.

Each year thousands of internationals participate in the “Palm Sunday Walk” waving palm branches and singing hymns while following the traditional route that Jesus took from Bethany into Jerusalem... or at least part of it. The beginning of the route is now blocked by the Separation Wall built by Israel with U.S. money on the guise of security. In Bethany the Wall divides Palestinians from Palestinians, father from son, child from school, patient from hospital. All too many of those internationals who have zealously come to



“walk where Jesus walked” have no idea that thousands of indigenous Palestinian Christians, many of whom are descended from the original disciples, are barred from entering the city by the Israeli military. There is no triumphal entry for them. Instead faithful Christians and clergy alike are forced to shout “Hosanna” from the other side of a thirty-foot concrete wall as they face their holy city of Jerusalem but cannot enter. They understand the true meaning of Hosanna. “Save us! Save us now!”

As we begin to celebrate Holy Week and look forward to the resurrection, let us continue to be mindful of those whose voices are crying out for redemption, for release from captivity, for justice, for freedom, for the basic human rights that God granted to *all* people. Let us not only pray for them, but let us join Jesus on that walk to Jerusalem, so that we can do the work He called us to do, so that others can be free.

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for sending us your son to bring the good news to the world. As we walk with Jesus toward this New Jerusalem, where there will be an end to the systems of oppression in this world, where the oppressed will be set free so that all your people may rejoice, give us the courage to work for justice, the strength to be persistent, and open hearts for all your people so that one day the cries of “Hosanna, Save us” will be replaced by a glorious “Halleluiah!” Amen.

*Janet Lahr Lewis
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Monday of Holy Week

“Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them^[a] with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii^[b] and the money given to the poor?” ⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it^[c] so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” *John 12:1-11*

“There is a Name I love to hear,
I love to sing its worth;
It sounds like music in my ear,
The sweetest Name on earth.
This Name shall shed its fragrance still
Along this thorny road,
Shall sweetly smooth the rugged hill
That leads me up to God.

Oh, how I love Jesus,
Oh, how I love Jesus,
Oh, how I love Jesus,
Because He first loved me!”

“Oh, how I love Jesus” vs. 1,8, by Frederick Whitfield

Jesus knew of the dangers he faced in Jerusalem, but still took time to have dinner with his friends in Bethany. After Mary had “chosen what is better,” (Luke 10:42) she came to realize more about their family friend, Jesus. Her understanding led her to love and be devoted to Jesus.

Because of her devotion, she anointed Jesus with “a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume, she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair” (v.3). Mary had the courage to act on her love for Jesus. Her actions were counter-cultural. Women then and now are often restricted by traditions; Jesus called it, “Making void the word of God by your traditions” (Mark 7:14).

Even as the fragrance of her extravagant devotion filled the room, it caused trouble in the hearts around Jesus and Mary at this dinner. Some attendees were plotting how to kill both Jesus and Mary’s brother, Lazarus. Even one of Jesus’ disciples, Judas, questioned the extravagance. Beyond Mary’s intent and understanding, Jesus gave purpose and name to Mary’s act of anointing; “Leave her alone; she has kept it for the day of my burial” (v. 7). Her act of devotion showed how much she loved Jesus.

No fear of others stopped Mary from her act of love and devotion.

Like Mary’s, our acts of courage, devotion, adventure, and risk are named and given eternal meaning by God. “For we are God’s handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). “Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ and manifests through us the sweet aroma of knowledge of Him in every place” (2 Corinthians 2:14).

IN BETHANY TONIGHT

The fragrance of costly love is still spreading in Bethany. Costly devotion goes out to Jesus in service at the Four Homes of Mercy for Disabled in Bethany, www.fourhomesofmercy.com.

Dinner is being served for Jesus in Bethany tonight. “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

Please consider an extravagant gift of devotion for Jesus’s dinner tonight in Bethany at the Four Homes of Mercy for Disabled. Use Advance project # 3020711 United Methodist General Board of Global ministries www.umcmission.org.

Abba Father, we praise you for salvation, for Jesus’ obedience on the cross, for your gift of the power of the resurrection. We praise you for allowing us to “hear” Jesus say, “But I have called you friends” (John 15:15).

May we have the courage for the adventure as we “present our bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to you, which is our reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). Amen.

*- Randie Clawson
Former UM Volunteer in Mission in Palestine and Israel*

Tuesday of Holy Week

“Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: ...God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” *1 Corinthians 1:26a, 27b*

“Thou didst accept their praises;
accept the prayers we bring,
who in all good delightest,
thou good and gracious King.”
“All Glory, Laud, and Honor” vs. 5, by Theodulph of Orleans

Holy week is a time of extremes converging in one place: the unbearable weight and violence of military occupation; the people’s hopes for liberation that flooded the streets of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; Jesus’ decisive turning the tables on the moneychangers who were profiting from oppressive military rule; and people’s uncertainty and fear of what might come next.

Today, Palestinians face many of the same extremes: more illegal Jewish-only settlements being built; more home demolitions; a devastating war in Gaza; and the ongoing loss of land under military occupation. Precisely, in this moment of extremes, we are invited to hear again apostle Paul’s urging: *“Consider your own call, brothers and sisters.”*

As in first century Palestine, the world still continues to worship military might and corporate power while dismissing as weak and foolish nonviolent actions of grassroots communities. Ten years ago hundreds of Palestinian civil society organizations joined together in a **call** for nonviolent moral economic actions for justice, freedom and equality. Five years ago, Palestinian Christians launched the Kairos Palestine document that **calls** on churches to join in nonviolent actions of boycott and divestment.

During these same 10 years, the US government provided over \$30 billion in weapons to Israel. What hope do nonviolent actions of Palestinians, international partners, and Israeli peace groups have in the face of such deadly military might?

Now, more than ever, we need to take Paul’s question to heart: *“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Cor. 1:20b)* Slowly and steadily, the seemingly foolish and weak actions of churches, campuses, and trade unions across the world that are taking up nonviolent actions of boycott, divestment & sanctions (BDS). And these nonviolent actions are forcing multi-billion dollar corporations to change their practices and end their profiting from military occupation.

This holy week let us consider our calling: to join together with Palestinians to challenge the wisdom of this world with foolish actions of nonviolent resistance that God has chosen!

O Lord, so often we feel foolish, unwise, weak and unprepared to face prolonged violence, military might and corporate greed. Help us to hear your call anew that it is we that you have chosen to join in nonviolent actions with Palestinians seeking justice, freedom and equality for all. For Your weakness is stronger than any human strength. Amen.

- By David Wildman
*Executive Secretary for Human Rights & Racial Justice
General Board of Global Ministries*

Wednesday of Holy Week

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” *Hebrews 12:1-3*

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.”
“Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus”, by Helen H. Lemmel

In the age we now live, running a marathon, participating in a sporting event or competing in an Olympic event has a great appeal. Though these activities require self-discipline, patience and endurance, they ultimately lead to a much coveted reward such as self-esteem, fame or material benefits. The apostle Paul shared in his various writings insights on how to prepare oneself for competitive events. As well, he pointed to potential challenges that a competitor could face. He emphasized that discouragement and trials could be part of any contest and he warned of tough opposition and criticism along the way, as well as the temptation to cheat and be dishonest. To avoid the many pitfalls, he advises the Corinthians to fix their eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay ahead, endured the cross, scorned the shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Just as many athletes today know and are motivated by other athletes who achieved greatness, so much that they persevered until they reached their goal or their personal best, Paul reminds us that Jesus and a great cloud of witnesses went before and set an example for us, cheering us on until the end of the race. Even in the face of great suffering and trials, with our eyes fastened on Jesus, we too can lay aside the things in our lives that hinder us on our spiritual journeys and complete the race set out for us.

During this Lenten season, can we challenge ourselves to look inwardly to see what things are hindering our spiritual growth and our witness for Christ? What hinders us from serving Christ and serving others? What hinders us from seeking God’s face and fellowship? I challenge each of us to identify 2 or 3 things in our personal lives that are hindering our progress and lay them aside so that we can run the course and finish the race.

Dear Lord, as we reflect on our purpose and mission in life, we pray for grace to be faithful servants who will follow you faithfully. May we fix our eyes upon you as we cast aside the weights that are distancing us from you. Amen

- Brenda Awad
GBGM Missionary to Palestine and Israel

Maundy Thursday

“² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, servants^[d] are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. ¹⁸ I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, ‘The one who ate my bread^[e] has lifted his heel against me.’ ¹⁹ I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he.^[f] ²⁰ Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.”

John 12:13-20

“Go to dark Gethsemane,
ye that feel the tempter's power;
your Redeemer's conflict see,
watch with him one bitter hour.
Turn not from his griefs away;
learn of Jesus Christ to pray.

“See him at the judgment hall,
beaten, bound, reviled, arraigned;
O the wormwood and the gall!
O the pangs his soul sustained!
Shun not suffering, shame, or loss;
learn of Christ to bear the cross.”

Go to Dark Gethsemane, vs. 1, 2, by James Montgomery

I often try to imagine this night with all the intensity, emotions, and thoughts that must have been running through everyone’s mind. I have sat in the darkness of the Tenebrae service of my home church year after year wondering the same thing. As the night and its unfolding grew darker and darker, what was it like? Now, I have a better understanding of what the scene might have looked like, between the Garden and the Gates of Jerusalem. My imagination is ignited, picturing these events more clearly.

With so much packed into one day, it is easy to forget all that happened on that Thursday night, especially given the different Gospel accounts – the Last Supper, the washing of feet, Christ’s desperate prayers in the garden while the disciples slept, the arrest, the trial. I wonder, later in the night, if the disciples remembered the events at the supper. Did they think on Christ washing their feet at all? Did it strike them as strange? Did they wrestle with the meaning of his words in the context of everything else that had happened?

As Christians, we live our lives in that space and time between the Garden and Jerusalem, between darkness, despair and redemption, the Kingdom of God. Living here has not only enabled me to picture the events of that night, but living amongst the oppressed has also led me to feel the darkness of that evening much more deeply than I had before. In this liminal space, we are also called to live out the invitation presented by Christ’s actions and words as he washed the disciples’ feet. Christ makes his invitation clear – “to wash one another’s feet.” This invitation is one of service and cleansing. It is through lives of services to others that we may cleanse our world of greed and injustice.

O Lord, be with us as we enter these holy days. Remind us daily to live a life of service to others that cleanses our world of injustice. As we remember and accept your invitation, be with us when that journey leads us through darkness and despair. Amen.

- Grace Killian
GBGM Global Mission Fellow to Palestine and Israel

Good Friday

“Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. ²¹ The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.”

²² Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

²⁴ “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.”

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

“They divided my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.”^[b]

So this is what the soldiers did.

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” ²⁷ and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.” *John 19:16-27*

“Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were a present far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

“When I survey the Wondrous Cross” vs. 4, by Isaac Watts

Standing at the foot of the cross is a difficult place to be. We want to avert our eyes, to look away from the agony of Jesus, to move quickly past Good Friday and bask in the resurrection 3 days later. “We are a resurrection people,” we cry out. But today’s scripture readings demand our attention.

One of the popular experiences for pilgrims who come to Jerusalem is walking the Via Dolorosa, the Way of the Cross, the traditional route that Jesus took as he carried the cross to Calvary. For Palestinian Christians, this is more than just a symbolic journey; it represents for them the cross that they must carry as they experience the daily reality of oppression and occupation. But they also see in the suffering that Jesus endured a source of hope and strength, an invitation to respond as he responded, in gentleness, non-violence and love.

It seems like everywhere we look these days, we see suffering. Wars, natural disasters, poverty, disease. The list goes on and on. It would be so much more comfortable to avert our eyes, to avoid the suffering, to insulate ourselves in our comfortable worlds and see only Easter morning. But, in his suffering, Jesus reached out to and identified with suffering humanity. He calls us to do the same.

There is a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s work, the Cost of Discipleship, “When Christ calls, he bids us come and die.” A difficult quote for sure, but Bonhoeffer is trying to convey the seriousness of a decision to follow Jesus, a decision that takes us to the cross. Jesus’ life was lived in perfect obedience to the will of God. But as we saw at Gethsemane, even Jesus struggled with that obedience. “Let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will but Thine” (Mark 14:36). Jesus was very much aware that letting go of his own will would lead him to Calvary.

Lord, as we meditate on your suffering, give us eyes to see the suffering that is present in the world around us, not just in far way news stories, but also as experienced by our own friends, families and communities. Give us strength and courage to respond in love and compassion, never forgetting the great love that suffered for us on the cross. Amen.

*-Tina Whitehead
United Methodist Volunteer in Palestine and Israel*

Holy Saturday

“As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus.

Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him.

Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,

and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.

"Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.'

So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."

"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how."

So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard." *Matthew 27:57-66*

“When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

“It is well, with my soul,
It is well, with my soul,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.”
“It is well with my Soul” vs. 1, by Horatio G. Spafford

The sight of Coptic Christians being led to their slaughter by ISIS terrorists caused shock waves throughout the Christian communities of the Middle East and North Africa. Christians in the Holy Land are asking the question: “Are we next in line?” The persecution of Christians around the world today is becoming as appalling as what befell early Christians during the worst periods of the Roman Empire.

This lent season, Arab Christians will certainly understand what the Bible meant when it said about Jesus that he was "led like a sheep for the slaughter". On Good Friday and Holy Saturday Arab Christians will be able to vividly identify with the sufferings of Jesus as they mourn their martyrs in Syria, Iraq and in Egypt who were killed only because of their faith in Christ. The wives and mothers of the slain Coptic young men will surely identify with the mother of Jesus and the other women who saw the agony of Christ as he gave his life on the cross.

The good news is that Good Friday and Holy Saturday give way to Resurrection Sunday. It is my prayer that the fresh blood of Arab Christian Martyrs will generate a spiritual awakening in the Middle East that will bring spiritual energy throughout the Christian communities, that will overflow with the power of love, forgiveness and reconciliation and cause the light of Christ to shine with divine salvation and blessings on all the inhabitants of the Arab countries and Islamic world.

Lord, give comfort for those who mourn loved ones who are killed because they confess faith in you. Lord, be with those who languish in ISIS prisons and act to bring them release. Come and touch our hearts and forgive us our tendency to respond with hate and to lust for revenge. Great and mighty God, bless the people of the Middle East and North Africa with your peace. Amen.

- By Rev. Alex Awad
GBGM Missionary in Palestine and Israel

Easter Sunday

“Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.”

John 20:16-18

“I’d stay in the garden with him though the night around me be falling,
But he bids me go; thru the voice of woe his voice to me is calling.
And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own;
and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.”

“In the Garden”, by C. Austin Miles

“I have seen the Lord!”

Christ is risen! Hallelujah!
Christ is risen, indeed!!

The other day, Sophie, an elderly Palestinian woman living in Jerusalem was asked by a Jewish woman while crossing the street, “Are you waiting for the Messiah?” “No!” Sophie replied, “he already came and we are waiting for his return!”

In the midst of life, there is suffering, killings, tears and fears; there is also thriving, living, smiles and joys. Some days, we do not want to hear the news... how much more can happen in Syria, in Libya, in Nigeria, in Israel, in Palestine, in your place? Where is your faith leading you?

Mary saw the Lord! Sophie knows the Lord! Two women separated by nearly 2000 years, know their faith because of their encounters with the Messiah, Jesus the Christ! No matter, the trials of life, we can stand firm on our faith. We are not alone, and when we look closely, we can see the Lord in the eyes of our neighbors... then comes the hard part, living into the Gospel message of love and forgiveness, of justice and grace.

This year, in the midst of turmoil and conflicts, what would it look like if we lived our lives striving for extravagant justice and love?

I have seen the Lord! Have you?

Let us pray,

Amazing and ever loving God, remain with us, abide in us, and transform us! May we have the eyes to see hope in the resurrection and compassion to express love through justice to all of humanity. Amen.

*-Rev. Kristen L. Brown
GBGM Mission Liaison to Palestine and Israel*

