

2021.05.16 SERMON JERUSALEM SUNDAY ©Gyllian Davies†

This is Ascension Sunday. And... in the Anglican Church of Canada this is Jerusalem Sunday. Well there's a painful reminder! When I was in Jerusalem I learned this cross I'm wearing has its own theology. It consists of a large central cross surrounded by 4 smaller crosses. The central one is Jesus And these little crosses surrounding it represent the four corners of the world. Because all the world is beloved by God. Didn't we just hear that in the Gospel?

As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

The Central cross also symbolizes Jerusalem, the home of Christianity, where God's love was proclaimed by Jesus. So we can all call this place home. This place, the city of Jerusalem. So we can say ouch for what is going on there right now. And with all our hearts we can hold Jerusalem in passionate prayer. Jerusalem the holy city. Holy not just to Christians but to all the Abrahamic faiths. It is no less holy to the Jewish faith and to Islam than it is to Christianity. And we all three descend from Abraham. We share a common source. And of course we share a common God. The one God.

*Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me,
so that they may be one, as we are one.*

Those words are from our reading too. So that they may be one as we are one. I'm not sure we're doing too well right now in protecting each other. In protecting the vulnerable of the Holy Land. I was reading an email on Wednesday from a Muslim acquaintance who wrote: "Tonight (May 12) North American Muslims including my family and I will be marking the end of Ramadan with the festival of Eid. Soon, thousands of Palestinian Muslims will gather at Al-Aqsa Mosque for Eid morning prayers. I pray that they are not met with more violence. This past Monday, Israeli police fired tear gas, rubber-coated bullets, and stun grenades into one of the holiest sites for Muslims—Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque—while people were praying there during the holiest days of the holiest month of Ramadan. Then they blocked the Palestinian emergency medical service from entering to treat the over 250 people who needed hospitalization.

Palestinians were forced to use prayer mats as stretchers. Once medics were finally able to set up an on-site clinic, Israeli forces then attacked the clinic, firing stun grenades inside it."

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so that they may be one, as we are one.*

What, did you think we were only to pray for other Christians? You didn't think that God only cared about those of us who follow Christ, did you? That we're only to love others who are part of the tribe of Jesus? Oh no, we are called – *called*, my friends – to love. And love means speaking up against that which is counter to love. We know that. We know that we would protect those we love with all we've got. If our children, our grand-children, our parents or grand-parents are in trouble – we're there. We're showing up with our bodies or whatever we've got, to do and be whatever's needed because we cannot bear to see those we love suffer. I know you. I've been listening to your stories and I know what you'd do for those you love.

Jesus is telling us to extend that love, to stretch it out as far as it will go, as far as it's needed. Out into the world. Out into the Holy Land. Out to where it's deeply needed. To find out how

we can protect these other vulnerable ones. To speak out in their name. And I'm not only speaking of Palestinians. I'm speaking out for all peace-loving inhabitants of the Holy Land. There are so many of them. They don't make it into the news of course. How many of you know about the Women Wage Peace Walk in 2017 where 4,000 women, half Israeli, half Palestinian, walked the length of Israel, from Lebanon in the north to the doors of the Knesset in Jerusalem? Never heard about it? Yeah. Peace and love – the signs of God's Kingdom on earth are not seen as newsworthy. But does that mean we give up? Does that mean we can excuse ourselves from remembering that there are mothers and fathers, grandchildren and grandparents, Jews and Muslims and Christians in Jerusalem, all longing and working for peace? Trying not to give up hope. We are not excused from remembering them. God does not give us permission to forget them.

*Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me,
so that they may be one, as we are one.*

When we hear stories like this of Women Wage Peace, what happens to us? Do we ask ourselves: "What does this mean for me?" Do we ask ourselves "How am I called to act? What does God want me to do?" or do we think things like: "There's nothing I can do". Well shame on us if we do.

Cause we *know* what to do. We've done it before. Who was it that brought Nestle's to a screeching halt with their baby formula promotion to mothers in developing countries? You don't know that story? In the 70's Nestle's is giving away free samples of baby formula to the poorest of new mothers in Asia, Africa and Latin America. These mums want to be like western world mothers so they use it. But once they leave the hospital they mix it with contaminated water and the babies get dysentery and die. Or they dilute it with too much water trying to make it go further and *millions* of babies die from malnutrition. And all over the world women in churches join with social justice organizations and publicly shame Nestle's into stopping.

And with apartheid in South Africa, churches join with others to boycott South African exports and... people pray for the persecuted in South Africa. Finally... official apartheid ends. Shortly after that the World Council of Churches holds its triennial meeting in South Africa. A friend of mine is a delegate and tells this story: Over and over people from around the world say how sorry they are they hadn't done more to help. And over and over again the South Africans say "Oh but you did. You prayed for us. We could feel it. It made all the difference. It made it so we could hang on." We prayed. And it made all the difference.

So we do know what to do for Israel and Palestine. Pray. Love. Love both sides of the situation. Form coalitions. Join existing coalitions. Believe we can make a difference. With God's help we can make a difference.

We are called to pray and to love. And here's the deal: PRAYER IS LOVE. Love made manifest. The night before he is going to be crucified Jesus stops and prays for his disciples. That's what the Gospel is today. We are listening to Jesus' prayer for his followers, the ones he loves. It's prayer because it's centred in love. It's prayer because Jesus is talking to God. It's prayer because Jesus is lifting up his concerns for the ones he loves. When we ask God to protect or

inspire or heal or give courage or hope or serenity to anyone – that is an act of love. Which is also praying. They can't be separated.

The writer Anne Lamott says there are three essential prayers: "Help, Thanks, Wow". That about covers it, doesn't it? And all three of those are forms of love. So let us pray "Help". Pray 'help' to God and pray 'help' to our political leaders. When the people lead the leaders will follow. And let us pray "Thanks". Thanks to all those already working for peace, inside Israel and Palestine and all over the world. Let us pray "Thanks" for their faithfulness and tenacity and let us pray "Thanks" that we get to join them from wherever we are.

And let us pray "Wow" for the power of prayer. Let us pray "Wow" for the courage of many hearts. Let us pray "Wow" for the love of God which shines from Palestinian mothers and Israeli mothers, from our hearts to their hearts. Let us pray "Wow" for the light and love of God which does prevail. We've seen it. We believe.

Amen.