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~ John 17:1-11 ~

Day of Prayer for Jerusalem and the Holy Land

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After Jesus had spoken these words [to his disciples,] he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you, for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

Grace and peace to you With gratitude, mutual respect, and a spirit of reciprocity, I would like to acknowledge that I am here on the ancestral home, cultures, and oral teachings of the Treaty 7 signatories.

This includes the Siksika (Six-ih-gah), Piikani (Be-gun-nee), and Kainai (Gaa-nah) Nations; the Îethka Stoney Nakoda (Ee-iith-kah Stow-nee Nah-koh-duh), including the Chiniki (Chin-ih-key), Bearspaw (Bears-paw), and Good Stoney (Good Stow-nee) Bands; and the Tsuut’ina (Sue-tin-ah) Nation.

This land is also the homeland of the Métis (May-tea), including the Otipemisiwak (Oh-tay-Pem-soo-wak) and the Métis Nation of Alberta, with Battle River Territory, Nose Hill Métis District 5, and Elbow Métis District 6.

The place now called Calgary is known as Wicîspa (Win-cheese-pah), Guts'ists'i (Goo-tist-see), and Moh'kinstsis (Moh-gihn-s-tis), a gathering place where the Bow and Elbow rivers meet.

I would like to honour the original caretakers of the land and to live into a shared responsibility for truth, reconciliation, and right relationship with one another and with creation.

Let us pray, O God, calm our bodies, our hearts, our minds, and our spirit, that we may hear your word and be fed. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

There is something powerful about hearing names.

There was a play once about missing women. For most of the performance they were spoken of as a group. A category. A statistic. But at the end, their names were read aloud, one by one, and everything changed. Because they were no longer "them" They were people.

That shift matters.

Because it is easy, especially from a distance, to speak about places like Jerusalem or Gaza in broad terms. Political terms. Historical terms. But what is spoken about are not abstractions.

These are human lives.

Lives known by name.

The Day of Prayer for Jerusalem and the Holy Land invites the church into that kind of attentiveness.

It is not simply a call to pray for a place, but for people. For those who live in a land sacred to many, and wounded in many ways. A land that carries the weight of history, faith, promise and conflict.

To pray for Jerusalem is to pray for peace. Not a shallow peace. A peace rooted in justice, dignity, and the recognition of each person's humanity.

There is also something that must be named with clarity and care.

Christian history has not always spoken well or truthfully about Jewish people. Theological ideas such as supersessionism and anti-Judaism have contributed to centuries of harm.

So this day requires a particular kind of vigilance.

There is no place for antisemitism in Christian faith.

At the same time, naming that truth does not mean silence in the face of suffering. It does not mean turning away from the realities of violence, displacement, and the scale of destruction and loss of life among Palestinians, and the genocide.

Holding both of these truths at once is not easy.

But it is necessary.

Scripture offers a way into this tension.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus prays:

“Holy Father.....protect them.... that they may be one.”

This prayer is not about erasing difference. It is not about forcing agreement. It is about a unity that hold difference without turning it into division.

Unity, in this sense, is not about borders.

It is about relationship.

It is about the refusal to dehumanize.

It is about the possibility that even in deep disagreement and conflict, humanity is not lost.

A unity shaped by love.

There is a temptation in moments of conflict to reduce people to categories.

To speak of entire groups as if they are singular, uniform, and fixed.

But this is precisely what the Gospel resists.

God does not relate to humanity in categories or statistics.

God calls people by name.

Every life matters. Every story matters. Every loss matter.

There is an ancient Jewish practice that I read about a number of years ago, which offers a way to remain grounded in the midst of suffering.

Its called *Dayenu*

The word *Dayenu* means, “it would have been enough”

It comes from the Passover liturgy, where the story of liberation from slavery in Egypt is retold. As each act of God’s deliverance is names, the community responds, “*Dayenu.*” Even if only that one act had occurred, it would have been enough.

If the sea had been parted, *Dayenu.*

If the people had been led through safely, *Dayenu.*

If food had been provided in the wilderness, *Dayenu.*

The practice is not about minimizing hardship. It is not about pretending that suffering is insignificant. Rather it is a way of remembering that God’s presence and faithfulness have been real and tangible, even in incomplete and unfinished circumstances.

Dayenu forms a posture of gratitude in the midst of longing.

It refuses to let despair have the final word.

It teaches that even partial glimpses of liberation and care are meaningful, even while deeper healing is still needed.

For the church, this practice carries significance.

It reminds us that hope is not only located in some distance future resolution but in the presence of God here and now.

It invites us in a way of seeing the world that does not deny suffering, but also does not lose sight of grace.

At the same time, this day is not only about remembrance.

It is also about truth.

There are realities of violence and suffering that cannot be ignored. There are lives killed, families grieving, communities displaced.

To speak of these things is not to deny the humanity of others.

It is to insist that all suffering matters.

Now, there is a need for some theological clarity here. Some interpretations within Christianity have suggested that events in the Holy Land, including conflict, are necessary for the fulfillment of God's purposes.

This is not our Christian understanding.

The Gospel does not teach that suffering is required for redemption.

God's work in the world is not dependent on violence.

God's desire is life.

So what does it mean to pray on this day?

It means resisting hatred in all its forms.

It means holding space for grief without turning it into division.

It means speaking truthfully, carefully, and with humility.

It means remembering that every person, on every side of every conflict, is known and loved by God.

And it means praying.

Praying for Jewish communities, that they may live free from fear and harm.

Praying for Palestinian communities, especially those enduring immense suffering.

Praying for peace that is not imposed, but cultivated.

Praying for justice that restores rather than destroys.

Dayenu teaches that even small movements toward healing matter.

Even acts of compassion matter.

Even moments of recognition matter.

But it also leaves space to say: more is still needed. More justice, more peace, more healing.

So the church prays.

Not because the answers are simple.

But because God is present.

And because very name matters.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**