

## **A Freedom Walk - Palestine**

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I went for a walk today in the outskirts of Jerusalem. I walked in protest with my brothers and sisters for the Human Rights of those who live in Occupied Territory. The signs and chants of the protesters who walked the street on the way to the house razing echoed with alarming clarity the words of prophets who have gone before. They came to say that everything is not all right in the world: people still work in sweatshops; we are destroying our environment; the inequality between people is growing; and countries go to battle over economic resources.

Oh, in some sectors of the world the stock market may be climbing, Microsoft may be booming, but anyone who believes that this has only been a century of progress and prosperity should, as a friend of mine so aptly put it, "Wake up and smell the napalm". While some of us here today may be prospering, a great many of the world's people live in poverty and suffer under cruel oppression or endure bloody warfare and exile. The course for some is to carry signs and chant protests.

Here I am among "them" possibly encountering tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets from those watching, waiting for the sign of unruly behavior. I am aware that many people wish we would go away. Some of you probably hoped that the throngs of protesters would just go away so that the discomfort and tension would subside and everyone would know how nice and friendly humanity can actually be. I, too,



have often wished the chants would go away and the protesters, protesters by the thousands would find another way to make themselves known.

I have to admit, however, that I am glad for the protests. I am glad I am walking with them. Walking with my friends, a Catholic Priest from the Mid East Council of Churches and a formidable, liberal Rabbi from Jerusalem. While I can't support any of the violence that takes place - that of the Anarchist groups or that of the police army - I do think this dissension is a good thing.

I am reminded of what Archbishop Oscar Romero from El Salvador once said, "What starts conflicts and persecutions, what marks the genuine church, is when the word, burning like the word of the prophets, proclaims to the people and accuses; proclaims God's wonders to be believed and venerated, and accuses of error those who oppose God's reign, so that they may tear that error out of their hearts, out of their societies, out of their laws, out of the structures that oppress, that imprison, that violate the rights of God and of humanity." A path in the wilderness is being cleared today.

Of course, the proclamation of "comfort to the afflicted" that we find in the prophet Isaiah is inherently accompanied by some "affliction of the comfortable." This is what I have been feeling as I intertwine with the Palestinians this week. Are we able, as North Americans, to continue to think in terms of picture perfect lives while so many others in the world have little to nothing? And if so, what does that communicate about our faith, our wakefulness?



For, as Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "A religion that professes a concern for the souls of (human beings) and is not equally concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them, is a spiritually moribund religion."

The more I read the Israeli "Jerusalem Post" this week where only one - sided news is primarily noted, I could not help but think juxtaposing between the pages in the message of visionaries of the past. I see the prophet, John the Baptist, walking through the streets, weaving his way through the masses, smiling because, at least a few people finally figured out what he was trying to say. What a perfectly appropriate thought....crying in the wilderness...wake up! Of course, not long after that my hypothetical John the Baptist was mistaken for a homeless madman and was taken into custody.

Still, as we walk along, the message continues to be proclaimed, a path is being cleared in the wilderness. Comfort is coming for the people in exile. God is more powerful than any oppressors, be they kings, presidents or dictators, politicians or professionals, generals or multinational corporations. So, at least for a moment, as we walk the walk, carry the banner, and protest the bulldozing of the Palestinian household, let us consider whether or not we will go back to "business as usual." We stand at the advent of new life and hope breaking into the world. The coming of a new morality!

Gifted preacher Howard Thurman once wrote:  
"Where refugees seek deliverance that never comes,



And the heart consumes itself, if it would live,  
Where little children age before their time,  
And life wears down the edges of the mind,  
Where the old man sits with mind grown cold,  
While bones and sinew, blood and cell, go slowly  
down to death,  
Where fear companions each day's life,  
And Perfect Love seems long delayed.  
CHRISTMAS (FREEDOM) IS WAITING TO BE BORN:  
In you, in me, in all humankind".

FREEDOM is waiting to be born. As people of the One Source, God, we have been called and empowered to act as midwives in the birthing of peace on earth, good will toward all. We have been asked to be co-creators with God of a new heaven and a new earth, where human rights and justice are welcome and at home where all God's children will be fed, housed, held and comforted.

And from the wilderness of Jerusalem the ancient voices of the stones cry out: Turn around! How often I wanted to gather your children, just as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and yet you could not! Open your eyes! Prepare the way!

Clear a path in the wilderness  
FREEDOM is waiting to be born.

Biblical references: Isaiah 40:1-11 & Matthew: 23:37-39

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