

Leader

Summer 2005

Sermon illustrations from our Global Community

As Mennonite peace staff, we encourage pastors and worship leaders to include perspectives from the global community in our worship services. Prayer time is one way, remembering to take concerns and joys from beyond our local community to God. Another is to include thoughts and learning from our sisters and brothers around the world. We hope these sermon illustrations are helpful.

Sunday 1

The Wisdom of God's Time: Ecclesiastes

Marianne Sa'adeh

submitted by Ed Nyce, MCC peace worker in Bethlehem for five years

(note: Ed occasionally uses this story in some of his sharing, and probably will again, but it likely will not be repetitive in most settings.)

In the town of Bethlehem lives a Palestinian Christian teenage girl named Marianne Sa'adeh. She and her family are part of the Greek Orthodox Church.

On March 25, 2003, Marianne was riding with her family in Bethlehem when their car came under fire from Israeli soldiers. She was injured, her father more so, and her sister Christine, age 12, was killed.

In Marianne's high school, a Catholic girls' school, the students have been journaling about their thoughts and experiences in their lives. Some entries are published in a book which was recently released, entitled "The Wall Cannot Stop Our Stories: Diaries from Palestine 2000-2004."

Here is a portion of Marianne's journal entry for January 16, 2004.

"Dear diary, Hi, how are you? I am not fine, you know why! Anyway, I don't want to talk to you about it, I'll keep it for myself. . . .

"I went to Jerusalem on Thursday, December 11, 2003, at 3 pm to attend a press conference entitled 'Who Will Wipe Away Their Tears?' in the American Colony Hotel. It was held by the World Vision. I crossed the checkpoint without any problems because the soldiers were nice at that moment and because I have a permit. A World Vision representative took my parents and me there. There were journalists and other adults, that made me the youngest one there. It was nice and it talked about the ones who were killed in the Intifada [in te FAH da], both Israelis and Palestinians. . . .

At 5:00 pm, I returned home. On the way, . . . We reached the checkpoint and I took my permit and ID card out, and got ready to cross. I was lining up with the rest of the people in the cold weather. . . . I was freezing to death because it was so cold. Suddenly a soldier threw a stone in my direction. I couldn't do anything. What could I do? Send it back to them?

Never! I am nicer than they are. They are treating us like animals. But I was upset because of that. What can we do to them? This is life in Palestine, you are just treated like animals.

"I was afraid and shaking because the stone passed over my head, and what helped me was that I ducked down on the dirt. First I was shot at and now they wanted to kill me with a stone thrown directly at my head. They would say, 'We're sorry, it was just an accident.' If you were in my place, what would you do?

I'm going to say, God forgive them for what they are doing against us. As Jesus said: 'Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.'
He also said: 'Forgive your brother 77 times as I forgive you.'

OK my friend, this is life. We have to thank God for what he gives us. I wish the situation would be better. Oh it's 2:00 pm. I have to go, take care and remember me. Goodbye."

the portions of Marianne's journal were taken from:

Atallah, Susan and Toine van Teeffelen, eds., "The Wall Cannot Stop Our Stories: Diaries from Palestine 2000-2004," Bethlehem: Terra Sancta School for Girls, Sisters of St. Joseph, 2004. 291 pp.; entry from pp. 128-130.

The book is available from American Friends Service Committee. ISBN 90 70415 33 X

We in North America have the cultural sense that life gets better over the generations—that our children will have more material things and less physical work to do than we do. We have the foundational sense that if we are Christian, we are people of hope. But as I met with Christians in Palestine a year ago, I began to wonder if our sense of hope is more the expansionist expression of acquisition, rather than the Christian belief in resurrection when faced with the dark of the missing sun on Good Friday. In other words, are we willing to sit in lament, with no answers, in the ashes, as Job's friends did when they finally stopped trying to solve his problems? How will we be able to relate to our sisters and brothers who face daily difficulties if our first and foremost question is, "Where is the hope in your situation?" Perhaps the question is, "May I sit with you and share your pain?"

—Susan Mark Landis

Sunday 2:

The Wisdom of God's People: Abigail, Esther & Solomon

In 1996 war raged in the eastern part of Congo. Rebel forces under the leadership of Laurent Kabila were advancing eastward toward the capital city of Kinshasa. Along the way the retreating forces of President Mbuto's army spent their fury by killing, raping and pillaging. Residents of Kikwit, 500 km. east of Kinshasa, were terrified what would happen when the

rebels reached their city and encountered government soldiers encamped on the west side of town.

Members of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Kikwit met to pray and to brainstorm what they might possibly do to spare their community of the violence that so many other communities had experienced. They developed a plan and presented it to the mayor. The mayor agreed to the plan and they went to work.

For over a month they gathered food, clothing, shoes and medicines – things that they thought the rebels would need. They prepared songs with which to welcome the rebels when they arrived. They trained groups of young people to do unarmed patrols in the city at night time, to ensure that no one was harmed. Most importantly, they delegated several wise people to go down the road to meet the rebels, to express the wish of the Kikwit community that there be no violence.

When the rebel forces did arrive at Kikwit, volunteers met them at a bridge outside of town and welcomed them with singing and with gifts. Some of the rebels stayed in the community for a while. Others accepted the offer of transportation out of the area. One person was shot and killed by a rebel, but there were no other killings in all of Kikwit. Further down the road toward Kinshasa there was much violence.

What was the key to the success of the Kikwit Church's peace initiative? Pascal Kulungu, a Mennonite Brethren leader and director of the Centre for Leadership, Peacebuilding and Good Governance, identifies a number of factors. 1) The church took the initiative to communicate with local authorities and with rebel leaders. 2) Church members drew up a plan and a strategy. 3) The plan included a singing welcome and the gifts of food, fellowship and hospitality to the rebels.

Credit: As told by Pascal Kulungu to Esther Epp-Tiessen.

Sunday 3

The Wisdom of God's Peace: Jesus Christ

During the 2004 American presidential election, a group of Christian leaders placed a full-page letter in the New York Times to “confess Christ.” These leaders wanted to counter the “politics of fear” that was pushing many Christians to opt for the political solutions of nationalism, militarism and empire. They wanted to convey a message to fellow Americans that faith in Christ is not about a “theology of war” but about loving enemies, praying for persecutors, and seeking the foolish wisdom of Christ.

While the American and Canadian contexts are quite different, Canada is experiencing pressure to increase defense and military spending, to support ballistic missile defense, and to limit civil liberties. The confession thus is worthy of consideration by Canadian Christians as well.

The main points of the confession were as follows:

1. Jesus Christ, as attested in Holy Scripture, knows no national boundaries.
2. Christ commits Christians to a strong presumption against war.
3. Christ commands us to see not only the splinter in our adversary's eye, but also the beam in our own.
4. Christ shows us that enemy-love is the heart of the gospel.
5. Christ teaches us that humility is the virtue befitting forgiven sinners.

The concluding paragraph of the confession was: "We believe that acknowledging these truths is indispensable for followers of Christ. We urge them to remember these principles in making their decisions as citizens. Peacemaking is central to our vocation in a troubled world where Christ is Lord."

The full text of the message can be found at
<http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=sojmail.display&issue=041020#2>