

PALESTINE REFLECTION: Community, mystery, story – a delegate's perspective

Written by Brian Gorman

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It seems appropriate that the May 2013 CPT delegation to Palestine began in the days between Pentecost and Trinity Sunday. At Pentecost, God comes to unify, to build community among diverse nations. Trinity Sunday reminds us that God is, in essence, a community, and that we are invited to experience God as the mysterious dance of three-in-one. Our delegation of thirteen, from the U.S., Canada, Scotland and Romania, has dwelt in these mysteries, feeling God's uniting presence in the midst of our differences.

We come to this land – most of us for the first time – bringing our own stories of settlement and racism from our ancestors in other lands. Our primary task up to now has been to learn the stories of the oppressed people groups here, and let those stories inform ours – stories of Palestinian families whose children have no birth certificates because one parent is from the West Bank and the other is a resident of Jerusalem, mere kilometers apart; stories of women in labor being detained at checkpoints and having to give birth in vehicles; stories of the Bedouin, a traditionally nomadic population of desert farmers and herders, who face home demolitions at a rate of 1000 homes per year, being forced from their land into towns, destroying their way of life; stories of the village of Lifta, the first of over five hundred villages emptied and destroyed by the Israeli army in 1948.

Competing stories reveal the cognitive dissonance and denial many people here and around the world live with. In visiting Yad Veshem (the Holocaust Museum), we struggled when we heard other tour guides speak to "Birthright" tour groups, furthering the narrative of the Jewish right to occupy the land, justified by the horrors of the Holocaust. From an Israeli settler we heard the contradiction between his expressed desire for the wall to come down and his need to carry a gun, between his hope for peace and his life of fear. As a team we've been challenged even to think of the violence here as a war, a balanced clash between two sides – the story often depicted in the media – when what we see is a one-sided, strategic, U.S.-funded obliteration of Palestinian and Bedouin land and human rights. These stories are forming the lens with which we will see the conflict firsthand these coming days in the West Bank.

We're thankful for stories from places like Sabeel, a Palestinian Ecumenical Liberation Theology center that is working to correct the Zionist narratives that have garnered so much support from Christians around the world.

We have been "dancing" with God as we visit the land Jesus once called home, weeping with

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him over Jerusalem, a city that still does not know the things that make for peace. And we pray daily for the Holy Spirit to enliven and empower everyone here, regardless of religion or race, to work for that peace, to help us all beat swords into plowshares.

Brian Gorman is a member of Christian Peacemaker Teams' May 20 - June 4 delegation to Palestine.