

Dark Gethsemane: A Lenten Message from the Holy Land

Colleagues,

We continue to get postings every few days from Christians in the Holy Land—some of them from people we know in the Lutheran Church in Palestine and Jerusalem. Back around Christmas time we posted a few of these messages to you on the ThTh listserve. Here is another such posting for Lent. The text for today's ThTh 146 arrived yesterday. PART 1 is from Rev. Sandra Olewine, Pastor with the United Methodist Liaison – Jerusalem. PART 2 is an "Appeal from the churches of Jerusalem."

Even in the face of these words from Dark Gethsemane—

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Dear Friends,

The last few days have seen tragedy upon tragedy. On Friday afternoon, 10-month old Shalhevet Pass was killed by a shot fired by a Palestinian in Hebron. She joins the list now of over 150 children under the age of 16, mostly Palestinian, who have been killed since September 29, 2000. Such acts – regardless by whom they are carried out – must be condemned and action taken to see that all such killings are stopped and that perpetrators are held accountable.

As members of the Christian peacemaker team serving in Hebron wrote, "It is with deep sadness that we note that the infant Shavalhet spent more than half of her ten months in a war zone. We wish she could have grown up in peace to meet Rami, her Palestinian neighbor from HartiSheikh. A child whose bedroom was

bombed last November when he was ten months old. We pray for an end to the killing. We deplore that the settlers Israeli military would punish a whole neighbourhood, due to one gunman's actions."

Yesterday brought us two bomb blasts in Jerusalem. The first in Talpiot I heard in my home at Bethlehem. I looked up from the computer, waiting to hear whether the sound was from a jet fighter. Moments passed and it was clear, as no airplane could be heard, that either a tank had fired or an explosion had happened. Twenty minutes later a call from the CRS Jerusalem office confirmed it was a bomb.

Yesterday afternoon another blast, this time in the French Hill area, killing the suicide bomber and injuring others. Ariel Sharon announced he would not retaliate until after the Arab Summit was over in Amman. This morning, unfortunately, brought word of another bomb. This time in the middle of the country. Three people were killed, two Israelis and the bomber. Another bomb was found a few hours later but was safely defused before any one else was injured. Sharon convened the Israeli Security Cabinet this morning and has announced that retaliatory action will be taken after Monday.

As I talked to Palestinians across the society in the last few days, everyone of them condemned the use of bombs, everyone of them felt sorrow for the killing of the infant. Yet, they also asked, "But, what does Israel expect from people whom they have crushed and crushed and crushed again? When people are desperate and cornered and angry, some will strike, and they will strike violently. Of course, we don't condone or rationalize these actions.

But, unless Israel begins to recognize that the noose she has placed around us is the contributing factor to such actions,

there will be others driven to horrible acts. People in a corner who see no other way out will strike you hard.”

My fear is that we are heading for a large scale massacre – where a huge number of deaths, both Palestinian and Israeli, will occur. Unfortunately, many people – from shop keepers, to taxi drivers, to human rights workers, to Bishops – share this fear of mine. It is almost as if we can feel it in the air.

Is that what it will take for the world community to take a more active role to intervene? What will be the magic number here that will make the world stand up and say enough is enough?

Israelis live again with the increased anxiety of renewed bomb attacks. “Is this bus safe? What is in that package on the corner? Is that a Palestinian next to me in line at the grocery store?” Fear and distrust of anyone who looks Palestinian is becoming rampant. Across Jerusalem today soldiers and police were stopping any young Palestinian man.

And for Palestinians, with Sharon’s announcement of Israeli retaliation, comes a week or more of even more heightened anxiety. “Will it be next Monday, or maybe this Friday or maybe not till after Pessach?” Israeli retaliation always means collective punishment, so how will the almost 3 million Palestinians have to pay for the acts of a few desperate individuals?

Below, I have copied an appeal from the Churches of Jerusalem. Please share it with your communities. Please call on your elected officials to act now!

Please don’t wait until more children, like 10-month old Rami or Shavalhet, join the growing list of tragic deaths. Please, for the sake of all of the children of Abraham, Hagar and Sarah, take action now!

The message of the Patriarchs, metropolitans, archbishops, and bishops who head the churches was prepared in an extraordinary session during the Christian holy season of Lent. APPEAL FROM THE CHURCHES OF JERUSALEM

We the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem:

Concerned for the spiritual, mental and bodily well-being of all the citizens of this Holy Land, Christian, Moslem and Jew, appeal to the Israeli Government, the Palestinian Authority, world leaders (secular and religious); as well as to all men and women of goodwill to help bring an urgent conclusion to the conflict affecting the lives of thousands in this land. We are convinced that peace-seeking negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians are the only assured way of providing for the well being of all our peoples.

We believe that the violence which has intensified over these past months will only end when both parties in the conflict make a determined effort to respect each other's rights whilst affirming the dignity and worth of every human life (man, woman and child).

We would respectfully request protection for all our people in order to assist the re-establishment of mutual trust and security for Israeli and Palestinian. Further we would call on all peace-loving people from around the world to come and join us in a manifestation of just peace.

Furthermore, we would ask for even greater assistance from our brothers and sisters abroad – governments, aid agencies as well as Churches and private individuals – for those in need in the areas of conflict. Despite all the kind help to date (for which

we express sincere gratitude) many are desperate for food, clothing, shelter and the like. In this appeal for help we would call to mind the words of Jesus when He said "In as much as you do this for the least of these my little ones, you do it for me". (Matt 25:40)

In a few weeks all the Christians of the world will celebrate together the commemoration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus died to offer the world God's forgiveness and encourage reconciliation. He rose again to offer the world fullness of life. We firmly believe that now is the time to establish forgiveness and reconciliation on all sides in order to work for fullness of life for every citizen of this Land.

Signatures of Their Beatitudes the Patriarchs and Their Excellencies the Heads of the Christian Communities in Jerusalem:

- *Archimandrite Cornelius:
Locum Tenens, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate*
- *Patriarch Michel Sabbah:
Latin Patriarchate.*
- *Patriarch Torkom II:
Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarchate.*
- *Ignatius VIII Pierre Abdul-Ahad:
Syrian Catholic Patriarch.*
- *Father Giovanni Battistelli:
Custody of the Holy Land.*
- *Anba Abraham:
Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate.*
- *Swerios Malki Mourad:
Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate.*
- *Abba Gabriel:
Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate.*
- *Riah Abu Al-Assal:*

Episcopal Church of Jerusalem & the Middle East.

- *Mounib Younan:*

Lutheran Evangelical Church.

- *Maximus Sallum:*

Greek Catholic (Melkite) Patriarchal Exarchate.

- *Paul Nabil Sayyah:*

Maronite Patriarchal Exarchate.

- *Andre Dikran Bedoghlyan:*

Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate.

Jerusalem

24 March 2001