



Homily Notes for Jerusalem Sunday | June 19, 2022

THE RT. REV. GREG RICKEL, AFEDJ BOARD CHAIR AND BISHOP OF THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF OLYMPIA

On all my pilgrimages to the Land of the Holy One, one of my favorite stops is St. Anne's Church in Jerusalem. Known for its amazing acoustics, it is a place every group sings. I love that. Sitting alongside the Pools of Bethesda. The White Fathers of France oversee it, as it is a French National Domain. I have never been there when "White Father" was not hanging out just inside and outside the front door of the church, welcoming, and helping those who come.

On one such occasion I was speaking with the monk who was present and one of our pilgrims, pretty much butted into our conversation, and asked him abruptly, "what kind of church is this?"

And without batting an eye, the white father said with great compassion, "when you walk through these doors, it will become whatever kind of church you need it to be."

I have never forgotten that.

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I have taken many pilgrimages to the Land of the Holy One. No matter what the itinerary from beginning to end, the "end" is always wrapped around the Emmaus story. We hope to help our pilgrims envision us, disciples, walking out of Jerusalem, wondering what is next. It is at this moment in our journey that I try to help our pilgrims get in touch with what they learned in our days there, and how that learning will translate into the pilgrimage of life back home. My hope, always, is that as they have walked in this Holy Land, with these Holy people, they see that all land is holy, and so are all people. I try to help them see that we can serve our God, Our Lord, these "living stones" in this land, by serving those in ours. Often I remind them of what I heard Dr. Maher Ayyad, the medical director at the Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza, say once when I visited there in 2015. We were discussing the life in Gaza and what would make it better. He wisely said, "the secret to a good life is making sure your neighbor has a good life."

The world can learn from that. That is Gospel. I like to remind our pilgrims that there is oppression where we come from. Walls that exist and walls that are proposed. Checkpoints of all sorts and conditions. Inequalities that beg for our attention. Poverty right next door.

We can advocate and live an openness that befits the Holy One we follow, wherever we are.

We can help peace here by working for peace there, wherever "there" is for us.



I love this story, this Emmaus story, precisely because it takes “the things that have taken place in Jerusalem in these days” and makes it about the things that happen in every place, in every town, in every person.

THE VERY REV. CANON RICHARD SEWELL, DEAN OF ST. GEORGE’S COLLEGE IN JERUSALEM

Some months ago, when we took it for granted that we could visit the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, I was with a group on pilgrimage with St George’s College. Having visited the beautiful Basilica, I took the chance to dive into the Casa Nova café next door for a coffee. Also there was an orthodox priest and I greeted him. It turned out that he was one of priests of the Church of the Nativity. He delighted in the name *Abouna Issa* (in English, Father Jesus).

We chatted and I told him how much we prayed for and were concerned for the Christians of Bethlehem. I asked him how he managed to care for his people pastorally. He said with great conviction, ‘I preach and I speak about hope. Even when the situation is so hard and even when I feel a bit dejected, I speak about hope. I do not believe that God has forgotten us and I believe he hears our prayers. Things will change and that’s what I tell my people. Then when they come to me for help, I do all I can to give them something.’ He finished by saying to me: ‘Please don’t stop praying for us’.

I was so touched by Abouna Issa’s steadfast determination and the Christian hope which infused him.

I am sure that many pilgrims to the Holy Land will have had similar conversations with local Christians who call themselves the ‘Living Stones’. Pilgrims may go to visit the stones of the holy places in the first instance, but it is the daily reality of the people who worship in these and many other churches in the Holy Land which really has the power to transform our understanding of our own discipleship.

THE RT. REV. BARRY BEISNER, BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA, *RET.*

One of the greatest joys of all my time in ministry has been the opportunity to participate in numerous pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and to be present with those who are making their pilgrimage for the first time. As part of our preparation and throughout the journey, we work at intentionally shifting from an ordinary sightseeing mode to something more prayerfully open to encounter with God, traveling as pilgrims rather than tourists. Along the way, and afterwards, I have heard pilgrims say, again and again—almost invariably—that their experience of the Holy Land has been “life-changing.”

Certainly the place, and all that it evokes, the way it gives new depth to the familiar stories of faith and new energy to the spiritual imagination, is a huge part of that.

But as much as the place, it is the people who inspire us, and move us so profoundly to want to be better disciples of Jesus. It comes from meeting and worshiping with small congregations of fellow



Christians living under great pressure and in very challenging circumstances, whether it is life in the Occupied Territories, or in Gaza, or in Israel itself. We get to see how those congregations, and the

Diocese to which they belong, work to support schools, clinics, hospitals, and other ministries that are open to all, that serve all, and hugely impact the lives of many persons out beyond the walls of churches. We see faithful, at times truly heroic, witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to the good news of his love for everyone. We see Christ's ministry of reconciliation being lived out effectively.

I once heard a previous American ambassador to Israel say that the presence of a strong Christian community is essential to the success of any possible Israeli-Palestinian peace deal—because the Church there is a bridge community, because through its ministries it is in compassionate service to everyone, because it demonstrates daily its core belief in the worth and dignity of every human being—just as we promise to do in our Baptismal Covenant.

A Holy Land pilgrimage can be a truly wonderful thing. But a trip across the ocean to the “Land of the Holy One,” as the Archbishop of Jerusalem likes to call it, is not really necessary. We can nurture a pilgrim spirituality right where we are. What is necessary—from the bonds of our communion in Christ, from the reality of our common mission in Him, is that we cultivate a lively awareness of the presence of Christ's people there, and with them join with Christ in his reconciling work. Without a doubt that kind of solidarity can be as “life-changing” as any pilgrimage. And it can serve as one a very real way for us to “walk in newness of life,” as one in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 6:4)

THE REV. CANON NICHOLAS PORTER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF JERUSALEM PEACEBUILDERS

Pilgrimage to the Sacred City of Jerusalem changed my life. It was inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We had been praying, when we stopped beside Golgotha and its open limestone side. Our guide explained to us that the church is set inside a stone-quarry pit, and the hill is an artificial one created by the quarrying of all the limestone around it.

But why was this hill of stone left? A closer look at Golgotha provided the answer. The stone was spoiled, damaged by water seeping through large cracks. Unfit for building and masonry, the cutters left it behind. It was then that our guide read the 22nd verse of 118th Psalm: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the keystone. This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.”

It was then that something like scales fell from my soul, and I realized all of it was true. I mean really true. The spoiled stone of Golgotha was the fulfillment of Psalm's ancient prophecy. Christ Jesus had lived and died and lives now because God loves us. It was all true; and the only question remaining was: how in the face of this truth, was I, Nicholas Porter, going to respond?



My response has led to who I am today, and each step of the way I remained engaged with the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and helping others become connected to the poor and dispossessed in our Lord's Land. Today I have the privilege to direct Jerusalem Peacebuilders – a ministry that promotes interfaith leadership and peace education among Israelis and Palestinians. Today, I help heal lives, and it is all because of pilgrimage and the day when the stone that the builders rejected became the keystone of my life.

THE REV. CANON MATTHEW DAYTON-WELCH, CANON FOR THE HOLY LAND, EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA

What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. - John 10:27

It turns out I'm getting better at driving on the narrow roads that course like little veins through the Holy Land's familiar cities. So long as you go at a steady speed and fold your review mirrors in—better to hold on to those when it's time to turn in the rental car—and so long as you keep one hand on the horn and add an extra hour for traffic, you'll be just fine.

I keep the windows down so I can hear the cacophony of life that roars from the alleys of cities like Nazareth, Nablus, Ramallah and Jerusalem. Be it up close or faint in the distance, you'll always hear the sound of kids clapping to Arabic dance music, of pilgrims singing and cats fighting. Even the dust that wafts into the car smells more earthy and authentic than anything back home.

I had the opportunity to drive to each of those cities last September to visit some of the schools, hospitals, and centers for kids with disabilities that the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem operates. I was late to every one of them, and when I got there, I was inevitably dusty and flustered. I'd double check the parking brake, wipe my face, and say a prayer of thanksgiving my scratched-up Skoda sedan didn't croak.

Getting to Christ Church School in Nazareth is nearly all uphill, but the view from the playground is sublime. You can see the whole city. So too with St. Luke's Hospital in Nablus, which sits on the ancient city's southern hill and faces north, so that every room feels like a bird's nest. Same goes with the Arab Evangelical School in Ramallah. And nothing beats the view from the Princess Basma Center in Jerusalem which straddles the spine of the Mount of Olives, and from where on a clear day you can see the Dead Sea and the foothills of Jordan.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells the disciples, "what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops." This is practical advice in a dense city where everyone is on top of one another. The back alleys are too congested to get a message passed easily. But the rooftops? They are all flat, like a stage. From there, you can really get a message across, especially in cities like Nazareth, Nablus, Ramallah, and



Jerusalem, whose surrounding hills create echo chambers. Jesus is telling his disciples, “don’t let the love you know get lost in the back alleys; shout it from on high for the whole world to hear.”

Each of those institutions has its own rich history, but each—being on high ground—also has its own rich witness. You have to look up to find them, and when you do, you realize the laughter of their children and the sound of their ambulance sirens echo off the rooftops and spill out to the world

below, a fitting complement to the church bell towers that ring out joy. Together, they are the symphony of hope our Episcopal sisters and brothers in the Holy Land perform each day.

The old stones that mark the history of our faith are on the ground, but the sound of life abundant bellows from up high, and that makes the Gospels come alive because you realize this story of a man who healed sick children and redeemed the world? It’s still going on.

And for that I’d drive all day.