



Steädfast / Sumud

FOR JUSTICE IN PALESTINE & ISRAEL

Presented by the Just Love Ministry

Week 6: PALM & PROTEST SUNDAY

Meditate MARK 11

¹When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, [Jesus] sent two of his disciples ²and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" ⁴They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ¹¹Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Explore



Key Findings from the Review Summary and Recommendations

For this task force, the name "Peace Not Walls" was emblematic of these larger questions. Most ELCA respondents who mentioned Peace Not Walls as a campaign name advocated for its continuation because they found it effective in communicating the identity and overarching purpose of the campaign for ELCA and U.S. audiences. Not a single Palestinian interviewee agreed. On the contrary, many had an adverse reaction to this name, categorizing it as naive (at best) or offensive (at worst), and in any case no longer effective.

Why? In recent years, Christian talk of "peace" (and of the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict") in the current political context has too often ignored or dismissed the real power difference between the state of Israel and the people of Palestine. Too often, Israelis and Palestinians are portrayed as two groups of people of roughly equal power and agency, locked in an intractable personal conflict, who need "reconciliation." Or, "peace" is determined by the cessation of violence, regardless of whether underlying structures of inequality are changed.

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Explore CONTINUED

When “peace” is used as a central organizing principle in these ways, then the rhetoric of peace itself normalizes the occupation by ignoring it completely or by implicitly treating it as a side product or consequence of conflict (“the walls can come down when Palestinians stop using violence”) rather than a cause of conflict (“the walls create a system of injustice that elicits violence as one response”). When “both sides” are urged to work for peace, this places an impossible onus for change on an occupied people who do not have this power. Only the state of Israel can end the occupation and dismantle its unjust structures. For the Palestinians we interviewed, “peace” language has become another tool of the occupation by framing the issue as one of personal conflict rather than systemic injustice.

This is not to say that peacemaking is not the goal. The above excerpt from the 1995 ELCA social statement *For Peace in God’s World* defines Christian peacemaking as a multifaceted disturbing, reconciling, serving and deliberating presence in the world.

This fuller sense of what it means to work for peace has guided, and will continue to guide, the ELCA in its engagement in Palestine and Israel, as in every part of the world where this church is called into relationships of accompaniment, awareness-raising and advocacy. Yet Palestinian theologians living under occupation caution us to remember that justice is the root of peace, not the reverse. As the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. also observed, “True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.”

Reflect

Jesus lived and ministered in an occupied land with and to an occupied people. The Roman empire controlled the distribution of resources including food and determined how and when people could move about and gather. Most of us have explored the ways Jesus ministry created tension with the religious authorities, such as healing on the sabbath and forgiving sins. Jesus’ ministry also created tension with the civil authorities and many Jewish leaders feared this tension would lead to retribution from Rome on all of Jerusalem. When we celebrate Palm Sunday, we celebrate Jesus creating tension in an unjust system, much like Moses and God did with Pharaoh

in Egypt. Choosing to enter Jerusalem on a colt echoed the promise from Zechariah 9:9, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Like the Jewish leaders during Jesus’ time, we often fear the tension necessary to confront unjust systems. We may denigrate the people causing that tension and we may even try to stop it. But as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, “We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the

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Reflect CONTINUED

oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed." And increasing tension is often the route to that freedom.

Have there been times you have called for peace without first acknowledging and dismantling systems that continue perpetuating injustice? How do you dismantle a system that you benefit from?

As an athlete, I often have to break down/tear muscle to get stronger and build those muscles up. I am stressing or introducing tension into my muscles. As people of faith, how do we similarly use tension to break down unjust systems to build them back up in ways that better align with God's vision for the world? If you're not sure, read this excerpt from *A Letter from a Birmingham Jail* and then respond.

"You may well ask, "Why direct action, why sit-ins, marches, and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has consistently refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. I just referred to the creation of tension as a part of the work of the nonviolent resister. This may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective

appraisal, we must see the need of having nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. So, the purpose of direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation."

Pray

*Healing God, You desire to heal the brokenness and pain in this world and reconcile all things to yourself. Give us courage when the route to true and lasting peace is filled with tension and discomfort. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear the cries of the oppressed and your power to set all things right. May our voices join the voices around the world crying, "Hosanna, Blessed are You." **Amen.***

Sing

ELW 841 Lift Every Voice and Sing
ELW 889 The Right Hand of God
ACS 903 Freedom is Coming
ACS 1037 Christ Our Peace