



**Holy  
Week**

**with**

**Gaza**

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# Preface

## We Must be Clear

Even while suffering grave injustices, we must adhere to our values of nonviolence and respect for the lives and dignity of all people. Our moral stance on a crime cannot vary based on the identity of the victim or the perpetrator.

In a just and ethical world, we would all empathize with others regardless of ethnicity, skin colour, religious background, gender, sexual orientation, or any other identity marker. Sadly, that is not the world we live in. And while identifying and speaking out about the crimes of the powerful against the world's most vulnerable, we should not pretend to be infallible ourselves and instead we must acknowledge and overcome our flaws.

We cannot justify the crimes committed by Palestinians on October 7<sup>th</sup> based on Israel's history of crimes against Palestinians. Being an activist or a freedom fighter, seeking the quest for the liberation of one's country and people, does not exempt one from respecting human rights or allow for the violation of international law. Palestinians have a storied history, a rich heritage, and ethical religious teachings that demands we act justly and humanely.

As such, Sabeel unapologetically advocates a position in which:

- We choose Jesus as our exemplar
- We admit our shortcomings when we fail to speak out strongly enough against violence because we are afraid of intimidation.
- We at Sabeel adhere to the principle that nonviolent resistance is the only kind of resistance. Evil cannot be overcome by evil; only love and nonviolent resistance can truly affect change.
- We consistently denounce violence especially against innocent civilians.
- We reject any justification for taking civilians hostage, especially children and the elderly.
- We insist that all participants in conflict must respect international law, with no exception. International law and human rights are not tools of advocacy but values and laws that must be upheld and respected by all parties.
- Whether Palestinian or Israeli, individuals responsible for committing war crimes must be held accountable.

In this spirit, let us unite in a steadfast commitment to forge a future defined by peace, justice, and mutual respect. Let the principles of empathy, nonviolence, and unwavering respect for human rights illuminate our path forward, guiding us through the shadows of conflict towards the dawn of understanding and reconciliation. We call upon all individuals, communities, and nations to join us in this noble endeavor, recognizing that true strength lies not in domination or retaliation, but in the courageous pursuit of justice, equality and peace. Together, let us create a world where the dignity of every human being is honored, where differences are bridged with compassion, and where our shared humanity is the cornerstone of our collective journey. In this quest, let the legacy of our actions reflect our deepest values and highest aspirations for a world healed by love, justice, and an unwavering commitment to nonviolence.

# Introduction

Holy Week embodies significant narratives central to Christian belief, illustrating a God who endured and triumphed over the agonies of oppression, torture, and execution. This triumph offers immense hope and fortitude to those enduring similar sufferings today. Through this booklet, Sabeel aims to vividly present Christ's teachings within the historical and present-day adversities faced by our Palestinian community, particularly in Gaza. Holy Week does not only symbolize suffering and anguish but also Jesus' approach of kindness, nonviolence, and, ultimately, resurrection—offering solace and motivation. As Christ aligned with the afflicted and urged his disciples to support those in distress, we extend an invitation to our Christian brethren worldwide to join us in discovering God amidst our trials.

This booklet, derived and expanded from the Sabeel Contemporary Way of the Cross to include the realities of Gaza within the Easter narrative, serves to aid participants of the Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage. This initiative is a network of independent Christian groups united by a common belief, participating in a contemplative act of solidarity in various cities globally. During Lent, participants emulate the journey across the Gaza Strip in a spiritual demonstration of unity.

The Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage was started by a Kiwi named James Harris who, heartbroken and feeling helpless, was moved to walk the distance of Gaza in prayerful solidarity. His impromptu actions raised over \$5,000 for relief organized by Palestinian Christians in Australia. His mustard seed action grew as friends in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and then the USA came on board. In short, they felt the Holy Spirit moving. Then, with the leadership of Suzan Wahhab, Jarrod McKenna, Lisa Sharon Harper and Mae Elise Cannon, as well as organizations like Palestinian Christians in Australia, Aotearoa Christians for Peace in Palestine, Freedom Road, Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network and Churches for Middle East Peace, these groups birthed this global movement of solidarity.

## Opening Prayer

Eternal and Compassionate God, who guides our steps in the way of peace and justice, we lift our hearts to You in prayer for all those participating in the Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage across the globe. Bless each soul with strength and courage as they walk in prayerful solidarity, embodying the spirit of unity and compassion in their journey.

We pray especially for those who are viewed as foolish by the world for believing their actions can spark change. Bless their conviction, O Lord, that in small acts of love and solidarity, great waves of transformation can begin. Encourage all who challenge the entrenched power structures, who dare to envision a world of peace amidst a landscape of conflict.

Empower those who, against all odds and in the face of intimidation, refuse to be silenced. Grant them the courage to continue to speak out, to stand firm in their faith and convictions, and to be unwavering voices for those who are oppressed. May their actions continue to echo the teachings of Christ, who showed us that love and nonviolence hold the power to overcome the greatest of adversities.

Lord, let their pilgrimage be a testament to the hope that refuses to be extinguished, a light that shines in the darkness. May their journey inspire others to join in solidarity, breaking down walls of division and building bridges of peace and understanding.

In their walk, let them find Your presence, O God, a source of comfort and strength. Bless them with the assurance that their efforts are not in vain, for in Your kingdom, no act of love, no matter how small, is overlooked.

We pray for a world where justice prevails, peace is cherished, and all Your children live in dignity and harmony. Through their footsteps, may we all move closer to this vision, guided by Your hand and inspired by Your love. Amen.

# Movement 1: The Palestinian Narrative

## The Great March of Return: The Triumphant Entry

### Background

The Great March of Return protests, which took place in Gaza from March 2018 through December 2019, were organized by a cross section of Palestinian civil society, grassroots activists, and political factions in Gaza to both highlight the impact of the siege and occupation and to re-center the issue of refugee rights. The main goal of the March [was] to bring back attention to the Palestinian Right of Return as enshrined in United Nations Resolution 194.

The March began on Friday, March 30, when Palestinians all over the world commemorated Land Day, marking the 42nd anniversary of the 1976 killing of six unarmed Palestinians who protested the Israeli government's decision to expropriate [21,000 acres of Palestinian land in the Galilee].

The March was set to proceed with a series of creative protests, sit-ins, and events leading up to May 15, which was the 70th anniversary of the 1948 Nakba, when Israel was established and nearly 750,000 Palestinians were expelled or forced to flee from their homes in present-day Israel. Israeli forces responded to the March by shooting tear gas canisters, some of them dropped from drones, rubber bullets and live ammunition, mostly by snipers. As a result, 214 Palestinians, including 46 children, were killed, and over 36,100, including nearly 8,800 children, were injured. One in five of those injured (over 8,000) were hit by live ammunition. During the same period, one Israeli soldier was killed, and seven others were injured during the demonstrations. [1](#)

The Palestinian refugee question is the core of the Palestinian cause. It is the issue of the expulsion of a nation 76 years ago from its original land through violence and terrorism, to be replaced by a nation who denies the existence of the expelled indigenous nation. Ownership of the land was given to the replacing nation under the slogan "A land with no people for a people without land." Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled from their homes and forced to leave their properties to become refugees in surrounding Arab countries and around the world.

A new foreign entity known as 'Israel' was established on the ruins of Palestinian societies and homeland. Despite the international community recognizing the right of Palestinian refugees to return and to be granted compensation—as guaranteed by international law, international conventions and treaties, and United Nations resolutions — the international community has failed to enforce the relevant resolutions on the right of return of refugees. Despite the Palestinian refugees'

continuous struggle to secure their rights, the Israeli occupation continues to deny their right of return to their homelands from which they were expelled.

Facing the longstanding denial of their rights, Palestinian refugees initiated a mainly peaceful movement through the Great March of Return. This March was a continuation of the struggle of the Palestinian people for their right of return, seen previously in the Great March of Return of 2011, the Global March to Jerusalem (GMJ) in 2012, and annual marches in the areas occupied in 1948 on the 19th of April each year.

## Scripture: John 12: 12 – 19

“12 The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. 13 So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord— He is your King!”  
14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: 15 “Do not be afraid, daughters of Jerusalem. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

## Reflection

The arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem on a donkey, celebrated as Palm Sunday, was a profound act in a city weighed down by the injustices of Roman occupation. Tradition held that the liberator, the king of Jerusalem, would enter the city on a donkey, symbolizing peace. The crowds cried out “Hosanna”—“Lord, save us” from the Roman occupation and their oppressors. According to tradition also, Pilate would make a grand entrance into Jerusalem on the first day of Passover Week from the west gate—the main entrance—banked by legions of chariots, horses, and foot soldiers, all clad in battle attire and wielding swords and spears, a clear display that Rome’s authority was unassailable.

Yet, the power of the people is enduring and significant. The masses gathered to the east, where the sun rises, its rays piercing the darkness, symbolizing hope and resistance. We Palestinians continue to participate in a continuous parade of resilience, demonstrating that the power of the people surpasses the might of any empire. Every day we shout “Hosanna, Hosanna, help us, Lord, and grant us freedom and peace”.

## Story

Mohammed Ayoub (14) was shot dead by Israeli forces in April 2018 during Gaza’s Great March of Return. According to Palestinian medical sources, Ayoub was standing with a group of protestors roughly 100-150 metres from the blockade perimeter when he was killed.

A few weeks ago when I was touring in Northern Italy, an IDF sniper killed Muhammad Ayub who was 14-years-old and peacefully protesting. I wrote this then:

## A Peaceful Protest

Bologna, Sunday April 22nd 2018

Muhamad Ayub

The birds have stopped singing

A bell tolls

I could sit here, and wither and die

In this beauty.

Yesterday,

On the train from Milan

I looked out over the Lombardy plain

Small farms, ordinary lives, peace.

I imagined dead olive trees and rubble.

On Friday Muhamad was fourteen

Now he is gone.

We cross a river

The massacre grinds on

I'd like to meet the man

Who taught the boy

Who pulled the trigger

His callous disregard.

I would spit on him and

Do no good

The birds have stopped singing

The bell tolls on.

Roger Waters, Musician and activist



## Prayer

During this Lenten season, a Franciscan blessing has marked the end of Sunday services at my church. It's a beautiful but challenging prayer that invites me to move straight from Sunday worship to weeklong works of mercy and justice:

"May God bless us with discomfort — discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts. May God bless us with anger — anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace. May God bless us with tears — tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy. And may God bless us with foolishness — enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done."

Two processions. Two kingdoms. Two symbolic journeys into Jerusalem. Stallion or donkey? Parade or protest? Which will I choose? Sometimes (I'll be honest), I'd rather just wave a palm branch, sing a few rounds of "Hosanna," and go home. The actual praise and worship Jesus invites me to enact on this last Sunday in Lent is far riskier; his donkey ride cost him everything. I dare not join Palm Sunday's parade too casually.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Parade or Protest?](#) Written by: By Debie Thomas Published: 18 March 2018

# Christian Zionism: Jesus Cleanses the Temple

## Background

In the words of Rev. Don Wagner:

“While there have been different strains of Christian Zionism dating back to the Sixteenth Century, the most politicized, powerful, and violent iteration of the movement has its roots in the contemporary Christian Evangelical Church. Modern Christian Zionists hold that the ethnic cleansing of roughly 750,000 Palestinians from their homes in historic Palestine in 1948 by Jewish Zionists was the fulfillment of a Biblical prophecy in which the so-called Holy Land must be resettled by the Jewish people in order to usher in the return of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Modern Christian Zionism is distinct from the modern form of political Zionism that arose amongst the European Jewish community in the late 19th Century.”

## Scripture: John 2:13b-17

“. . . and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

## Reflection

God incarnated, taking human form, to reveal Divine will on Earth within the creation God so lovingly crafted. Jesus’ mission was to illuminate God’s profound love for us, ensuring a promise of an abundant life. Each individual, being created in God’s image, is a testament to our collective identity as cherished children of the Divine. True religion and authentic theology are meant to act as pillars of support, safeguarding human life and rights, fostering communities where justice and compassion prevail. They should never be twisted into instruments of oppression, manipulation, or dispossession.

We Palestinians, particularly Palestinian Christians, have borne the brunt of the detrimental effects of Christian Zionism and its skewed theological underpinnings. This ideology strays far from the core Christian values of compassion and justice, contributing to our ongoing plight. The church must undergo a purification, stripping away any theology and corruption that aligns it with power and wealth at the expense of defending those on the margins. It’s imperative to advocate for a theology that elevates human dignity, champions peace, and mirrors God’s indiscriminate love for all creation, directly challenging narratives that cause harm or sow division. In doing so, we uphold the true essence of the Gospel, which calls for liberation, not just in spiritual terms but in tangible, earthly justice that resonates with the lived experiences of those who have been marginalized.

# The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism

The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism is a joint statement issued by Christian leaders in Jerusalem dated 22 August 2006.

The statement reads:

We categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as false teaching that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation.

We further reject the contemporary alliance of Christian Zionist leaders and organizations with elements in the governments of Israel and the United States that are presently imposing their unilateral pre-emptive borders and domination over Palestine. This inevitably leads to unending cycles of violence that undermine the security of all peoples of the Middle East and the rest of the world

We reject the teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support these policies as they advance racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ. Rather than condemn the world to the doom of Armageddon we call upon everyone to liberate themselves from the ideologies of militarism and occupation. Instead, let them pursue the healing of the nations!

We call upon Christians in Churches on every continent to pray for the Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom are suffering as victims of occupation and militarism. These discriminative actions are turning Palestine into impoverished ghettos surrounded by exclusive Israeli settlements. The establishment of the illegal settlements and the construction of the Separation Wall on confiscated Palestinian land undermines the viability of a Palestinian state as well as peace and security in the entire region.

## Prayer

Our God, whose love encompasses all of creation and whose mercy knows no bounds, we stand before You in a time of deep reflection and earnest supplication. We seek Your guidance and Your light on a path that has been shadowed by misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

Inspire us, O Lord, to pursue a theology of liberation, one that champions the cause of the oppressed and seeks justice for the downtrodden. Grant us the courage to stand against any doctrine that perpetuates racism, inequality, or exclusion. Let us remember that we are all made in Your image, and in that divine reflection, we are called to recognize the dignity and worth of every person.

Bless our efforts to embody a faith that heals rather than harms, that unites rather than divides. Help us to be bearers of peace, advocates for justice, and instruments of Your unconditional love in a world yearning for reconciliation.

In solidarity with our Palestinian brothers and sisters and all who suffer under the yoke of oppression, we commit ourselves to the work of liberation, not just in words but in deeds. May our actions reflect the teachings of the prophets who spoke truth to power and championed the cause of the oppressed.

Amen

# International Responsibility: The Last Supper

## Background

The UN states that, "International human rights law lays down obligations which States are bound to respect."<sup>2</sup> International human rights law serves as the bedrock of global peace and security, serving as a universal code that governs the actions of nations and ensures the fundamental dignity of all individuals. They are crucial because they provide a framework for accountability, protect individuals and groups from abuses, and promote a world order based on justice and equality. Respecting international law and human rights is essential not only for the maintenance of international peace and cooperation but also for the advancement of global development and the protection of the vulnerable. In a world marked by diversity and complexity, these principles act as a common language for navigating conflicts, fostering mutual respect, and underscoring our shared humanity. Ignoring them can lead to a breakdown of international relations, exacerbation of conflicts, and result in the erosion of basic human dignities. Therefore, adherence to international law and the upholding of human rights are imperative for creating a more just, peaceful, and equitable world.

## Scripture: Matthew 26:17-30

26 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." 30 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

## Reflection

The Last Supper presents a moving display where all partake from a single cup and break bread together, symbolizing a unity and shared communion that emphasize the will of God. This act of communal sharing underscores the inherent equality among all individuals, reminding us of the importance of treating every person and nation with fairness and without exception. Upholding equality and a consistent standard is crucial for any system to maintain the trust and faith of its people.

The Palestinian plight was caused by decisions made on the international stage, which sought to partition historic Palestine into two states. These decisions were made without the consent or even consultation of the Palestinian people, the indigenous inhabitants of the land. The ongoing struggle of the Palestinian people underscores the importance of recognizing and rectifying the disparities and injustices that have arisen from past actions, striving towards a future where equity and shared prosperity are realities for all. "The international community must address and rectify the injustices it has inflicted upon the Palestinian people.

## Story

There are many organizations and movements committed to the work of upholding international law, justice, and peace in Palestine. One such movement is the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, which is a grassroots people-to-people solidarity movement composed of campaigns and initiatives from different parts of the world, working together to end the illegal Israeli blockade of Gaza.<sup>3</sup> Formed after the 2010 Gaza Freedom Flotilla, FFC embodies the spirit of global solidarity, rallying individuals from diverse backgrounds around a common cause: the cessation of the unlawful blockade of Gaza by Israel. This alliance is a testament to the power of grassroots movements to foster change, uniting campaigns from across the globe including Canada, Italy, Malaysia, New Zealand/Aotearoa, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United States, and more, alongside partners in Britain, Australia, and France.

The FFC has been at the forefront of coordinating maritime initiatives to challenge and bring an end to the blockade, demonstrating unwavering commitment to human rights without discrimination based on race, gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality, or any other identity.

The collective approach is firmly rooted in non-violence and peaceful resistance, adhering to a principle that transcends political affiliations, to stand united with the Palestinian people in their struggle for freedom and dignity. Through various missions, including notable efforts by groups from Greece, the European Campaign to End the Siege of Gaza, and Miles of Smiles, we've consistently demonstrated our dedication to this cause.

## Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come before You with grateful hearts for the courage and commitment of all who advocate for human rights and champion the cause of nonviolence. In a world marred by injustice and conflict, their dedication to peace and dignity for all Your children shines as a beacon of hope.

Bless, O Lord, these advocates with Your wisdom and strength, that they may continue their work with unwavering faith and relentless determination. Grant them the perseverance to face challenges and the compassion to serve those most in need.

Inspire us all, God, to follow their example, to raise our voices against oppression, and to work tirelessly for a world where justice prevails and peace reigns. Help us to remember the teachings of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who showed us the power of love and nonviolence in transforming hearts and societies.

We pray for those who suffer under the weight of injustice, that they may feel Your presence and find solace in Your love. May the efforts of human rights advocates' bring forth change, offering them hope for a brighter future.

Guide us, Father, to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with You, knowing that every step taken in love brings Your kingdom closer. Unite us in Your mission of love, that together we may create a world that reflects Your glory, where every person is valued, and Your peace endures forever.

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://freedomflotilla.org/who-we-are/>

# Failure of International Community: Judas Plans to Betray Jesus

## Background

“The U.S. has vetoed resolutions critical of Israel more than any other council member – 45 times as of December 18, 2023, according to an analysis by Blue Marble. The U.S. has vetoed 89 Security Council resolutions in total since 1945, meaning slightly over half of its vetoes have been used on resolutions related of Israel. Of the vetoed resolutions, 33 pertained to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories or the country’s treatment of the Palestinian people.”<sup>4</sup>

Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, which resulted in the displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians, Israel has implemented an apartheid regime characterized by a dual system of governance. This regime includes the violent appropriation of Palestinian land, racial proPling, civilian targeting, mass incarceration, denial of refugee return, military occupation in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, and the relegation of Palestinian citizens of Israel to second-class status.

The United States is the primary supporter of Israel, providing extensive military aid that Israel uses for oppressive practices against Palestinians, including the injury and killing of civilians and destruction of homes and infrastructure. From 2009 to 2018, the U.S. supplied Israel with \$30 billion in military aid, and in 2016, an agreement was signed to provide an additional \$38 billion over ten years.<sup>5</sup> Despite U.S. laws meant to prevent the use of American aid in human rights abuses, Israel continues to use U.S.-supplied weapons for acts that contravene these laws.

The Trump administration further entrenched U.S. support for Israel, disregarding Israel’s human rights abuses against Palestinians. Moves such as recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, relocating the American embassy to Jerusalem, and acknowledging Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, combined with policies aimed at stifling Palestinian solidarity and criticism of Israel, highlight the departure of the U.S. from holding Israel accountable.<sup>6</sup> This situation underscores the responsibility of American citizens and the international community to demand accountability from their governments regarding military support to Israel and its consequences on Palestinian rights and international law. The narrative emphasizes the need for active engagement in holding policymakers accountable for their support of Israel’s actions against Palestinians.

## Scripture: Matthew 26:14-16

14 Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, “What will you give me if I betray him to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. 16 And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

4 [How the US uses its UN veto power to protect Israel \(globalaffairs.org\)](https://www.globalaffairs.org)

5 [U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel \(congress.gov\)](https://www.congress.gov)

6 <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-real-purpose-of-trumps-executive-order-on-anti-semitism>

## Reflection

For over seven decades, Israeli policies have led to the displacement of people, military occupation, and the entrenchment of an apartheid system. The enduring pain of this period is closely tied to the international community's involvement, particularly that of the United States, alongside other global powers like the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. Their steady support of Israel indirectly sustains the ongoing conflict. The extensive military aid, diplomatic cover, and significant financial backing from these nations, especially the U.S., have bolstered Israel's controversial policies. Such unwavering support for the Israeli military contributes to a vicious cycle of violence, underscoring a lack of commitment to achieving peace. This situation evokes the biblical narrative of Jesus's betrayal by Judas—a story of trust broken for personal gain. Similarly, Palestinians feel abandoned by the international community, particularly aggrieved by the actions of the United States, which they view as a betrayal of their hopes for justice and peace, much like Jesus felt in his final hours.

## Story

The following story is taken from a project of Sabeel, Kumi Now, from the entry on "U.S. Support of Israel."<sup>7</sup>

"I'm fast, and I love running.

17-year-old medal-winning track athlete Mohammad Al-'Ajouri used to dream of becoming an international competitor and traveling to the West Bank from his home in the Jabaliya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, a journey of merely 30 miles that is impossible for most Palestinians to make. Israel controls nearly every aspect of Palestinian life, including their movement between different cities and sections of the occupied Palestinian territory. When an Israeli sniper shot Mohammad in the leg, it might not have been the end of his dreams, but because he was denied permission to travel to the West Bank for treatment, doctors in Gaza were forced to amputate his leg.

When Mohammad was shot, he was helping his nearby friends who were suffering from tear gas inhalation. The sniper that shot Mohammad most likely used an American Remington M24 rifle or an Israeli Weapons Industries Tavor rifle, both of which are used with "exploding" ammunition that has been expressly banned under international law. These have been the weapons of choice used by the Israeli military on Palestinian protesters at the Great March of Return in Gaza for the last year: weapons that are being developed by the Israeli weapons industry, which is subsidized by the US and profits immensely from the military occupation of the Palestinian territories, and weapons that are being made and supplied by the US.

Mohammad was one of the luckier ones. With the help of the Palestine Children's Relief Fund, he was able to fly to Cincinnati to be fitted for a prosthetic leg, and he now has renewed dreams of being an athlete. His resilience and optimism speak volumes about the steadfastness of the Palestinian people, who continue to fight for equality, freedom, and justice in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges. Ending U.S. military aid to Israel would place Palestinians like Muhammad in a more empowered position to challenge the brutal Israeli occupation, and one day live in a world where their dreams can't be shot down by a sniper's rifle.

<sup>7</sup> <https://kuminow.com/ussupportofisrael/>

## Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come before You today with heavy hearts, seeking Your guidance and wisdom in a world fraught with injustice and suffering. We pray for the people of Palestine, whose cries for freedom and dignity have echoed through the decades, often met with silence or indifference.

Lord, we ask You to move the hearts of those in the international community, that they may adopt a single standard of justice and human rights, applicable to all nations and peoples. Inspire leaders and policymakers worldwide to recognize the value of every human life, regardless of nationality, race, or creed, and to act with courage and integrity in defending those who are oppressed.

Grant us the strength to stand against the injustices faced by the Palestinian people. Help us to raise our voices in solidarity, advocating for their right to live in peace and security, free from occupation and discrimination. May our efforts contribute to a world where accountability is not selective, but universal, holding all nations to the same standards of humanity and compassion.

We pray for a future where the land known for its ancient stories of faith becomes a testament to Your love and justice, a place where all can live in harmony. Let us be instruments of Your peace, working tirelessly to bridge divides and heal wounds, in the name of justice and human dignity.

In Your holy name, we pray, **Amen**



# Nonviolence: Betrayal and Healing of the High Priest's Ear

## Background

Palestinian nonviolent resistance to policies of occupation and injustice dates back to the Ottoman (1600s-1917) and British Mandate (1917-1948) periods. While the story of armed Palestinian resistance is known, the equally important history of nonviolent resistance is largely untold. Perhaps the best-known example of nonviolent resistance during the mandate period, when the British exercised colonial control over historic Palestine, is the General Strike of 1936. Called to protest against British colonial policies and the exclusion of local peoples from the governing process, the strike lasted six months, making it the longest general strike in modern history. Maintaining the strike for so many months required great cooperation and planning at the local level. It also involved the setting up of alternative institutions by Palestinians to provide for economic and municipal needs. The strike, and the actions surrounding it, ultimately encountered the dilemma that has subsequently been faced by many Palestinian nonviolent resistance movements: it was brutally suppressed by the British authorities, and many of the leaders of the strike were ultimately killed, imprisoned, or exiled. But this repression did not prevent the experience and inspiration of the General Strike and other acts of civil disobedience from providing models for future generations of Palestinian activists. Here we can find a recurring pattern in the history of Palestinian nonviolent resistance. One generation sees its attempts to establish new forms of resistance violently suppressed, and the next generation must use the historical memory provided by these earlier struggles to begin.”<sup>8</sup>

## Scripture: Luke 22:47-53

47 While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; 48 but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?' 49 When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, 'Lord, should we strike with the sword?' 50 Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' And he touched his ear and healed him. 52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? 53 When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!'

## Reflection

The foundational principles of Palestinian Liberation Theology are anchored in inclusivity, justice, and a steadfast commitment to nonviolence. Within this theological framework, the singular path of resistance is carved out through nonviolent means. Embracing the conviction that violence is inherently malevolent and self-perpetuating, adherents draw inspiration from Jesus Christ, advocating for a model of resistance that exclusively employs nonviolent tactics. In the pursuit of justice and liberation, if

sacrifices are to be made, they argue it should be in the form of self-sacrifice rather than inflicting harm on others. This stance acknowledges the allure of violence, often magnified by media portrayals that glorify confrontational acts. However, reflecting on the teachings and example of Jesus, it is asserted that true adherence to divine will eschews violence in favor of a pathway grounded in peace and nonaggression.

## Story

On October 11, 2023 Sabeel issued the following statement, illustrating our commitment to upholding the principles of Palestinian Liberation Theology:

In light of these challenges, we, the undersigned, pledge our commitment to nonviolence, influenced by the following convictions:

- The might of the Israeli Army and its affiliates is unparalleled; violence will not bring victory.
- Nonviolence is a potent force. It enables collective participation from Palestinians, Israelis, and the international community. The path of nonviolence is the most impactful.
- Our ultimate struggle is not against individuals; it is against evil. Violence harms individuals, but our true adversary is the inherent evil of occupation and racist ideologies, which can be vanquished with good, for God is the embodiment of goodness.
- We champion nonviolence because it resonates with the divine principles set by the Creator. As rain is impartial, showering both the oppressed and oppressors, we uphold God's ways.

To all those who believe in and exercise violence, we want to say:

1. Reject violence; it's not the solution. Don't be governed by wrath or vengeance.
2. To those still gripping their weapons, we beg you to adhere to the principles of the Geneva Conventions and the laws of armed conflict. Upholding the sanctity of civilian lives is a shared tenet across religions and human morality. Let all combatants refrain from the wanton destruction of human life and adhere, at the very minimum, to the principles of distinction, proportionality, military necessity, fair treatment of prisoners, and no means malum en se (inherently evil methods).
3. We do acknowledge those who have chosen to observe international humanitarian law even in the midst of so much devastation.

We extend an invitation to our friends, partners, and everyone devoted to justice, peace, and reconciliation to support our nonviolent mission. The longstanding policies of displacement, military occupation, and apartheid by the Israeli government must be dismantled, but not at the cost of our values and humanity. The elimination of the other is not a viable option. Stand with us in our nonviolent endeavors.

## Prayer

Heavenly father, We come before You with humble hearts, seeking Your divine guidance and strength as we endeavor to walk the path of nonviolence. Inspired by the life and teachings of Your Son, Jesus Christ, we commit ourselves to the pursuit of justice, not with the weapons of this world, but armed with Your love, compassion, and truth.

Grant us, O Lord, the courage to stand firm in our convictions, even in the face of adversity. May Your Holy Spirit empower us to be agents of change, using our words and actions to foster peace, understanding, and reconciliation among Your people.

Help us to see Your image in every human being, recognizing that true justice can only flourish where there is respect, dignity, and love for all. Strengthen our resolve to resist the temptations of violence, knowing that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil.

In moments of doubt or despair, remind us of the victories won through nonviolent resistance, and renew our hope in the transformative power of Your love. May our efforts contribute to the breaking down of walls of division, the healing of wounds, and the establishment of Your kingdom of justice, peace, and righteousness on earth.

Bless our community of faith and all who dedicate their lives to the cause of justice and peace. May we support one another in love, united in our common purpose and sustained by Your never-failing presence.

We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who taught us that blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.  
**Amen.**

# Nakba: Jesus Condemned to Die

## Background:

The events of 1948 are commonly referred to by Palestinians as "an-Nakba" (the catastrophe). Following the failure of the UN partition plan suggested in 1947, Jewish military groups began to take large areas of Palestine by force. During this period more than 500 villages were depopulated, the residents being expelled by force or fleeing from the advancing Jewish militants. The most appalling example of village destruction occurred at Deir Yassin in April 1948. Deir Yassin, a thriving Palestinian community of 600, suffered a massacre on April 9<sup>th</sup> of 1948 of approximately 120 men, women, and children at the hands of the Irgun and the Stern gang (Zionist terrorist forces). 1948 left a legacy that remains with the Palestinian people to this day. Issues of the right of return and compensation for refugees who fled and whose homes and property were destroyed or confiscated, both of which are provided for in UN Resolution 194, are yet to be resolved. Since Israel has caused the displacement of the Palestinians, destroyed their villages and towns, denied them their basic human rights, and illegally dominated and oppressed them, it is morally bound to admit its injustice against the Palestinians and assume responsibility for it.

## Scripture: Luke 22:66-71

66 When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. 67 They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us." He replied, "If I tell you, you will not believe, 68 and if I question you, you will not answer. 69 But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." 70 All of them asked, "Are you, then, the Son of God?" He said to them, "You say that I am." 71 Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!"

## Reflection

Just as Jesus was condemned to die, so the actions of 1948 passed a death sentence on more than 500 historic Palestinian villages that were completely destroyed across the country. We remember that pain of losing community, family networks and a sense of place. We open our eyes to the initial devastation caused by the founding of the state of Israel, a devastation that has never received acknowledgement, and we hold these people and their memories in our thoughts. "Over 75% of the population in Gaza are Palestinian refugees from 1948. For them, Gaza is not 'home' but has instead become a vast refugee camp. There can be no future for Gaza unless international law and United Nations resolutions are respected and implemented."

## Story

Reflection from Bishop Elias Chacour:

I reached Bir'am (my home village, which had been destroyed in 1948) just at sun-up...The light grew and filtered warmly through the olive branches. Only the chirping birds and the crunch of my steps on gravel stirred the silence. All about me the ruined stone houses were solemn, ghost-like. I climbed a crumbled wall into the dimly lit shell of the church. In the parish house, swallows sheltered in the remaining rafters. I stood frozen, dumb struck, nearly overcome by the sense of desolation. And yet, at the same moment, I was caught unawares by a deep sense of life. From the wrecked homes, I imagined that I heard laughter, the voices of women, men deep in conversation...In the church, beneath the empty and teetering stone tower from which our bell had been taken, "Alleluia" was sung by children's voices again. It occurred to me then that even bombs could never fully destroy such reverence for God and life and the land as we had felt here.....How terribly sad that men could ignore God's plan for peace between divided brothers, even supporting one group as it wielded its might to force out the other..[We are called] to lift up, as Jesus did, the men and women who have been degraded and beaten down.<sup>9</sup>

## Prayer

Although the dark night of oppression has been long, the dawn of justice will soon shine. May God work through people of good will to bring about a genuine peace based on justice and mercy so that forgiveness and reconciliation will prevail for all the people of Palestine. **Amen**

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<sup>9</sup> [Gaza Peace Pilgrimage Prayers and Reflections – Peace Pilgrimage](#)

# Refugees: The Cross

## Background

The Palestinian refugee crisis originated in the 1948 creation of the State of Israel and the later war and occupation of 1967. The war of 1948 caused at least 750,000 Palestinians to flee to the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt, with the same fate befalling 460,000 people in the wake of the 1967 war. In 1949, UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) was set up to carry out direct relief and works programs for Palestinian refugees. The Agency began operations on 1 May 1950. In the absence of a solution to the Palestine refugee problem, the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate. Currently, according to 2017 UNRWA figures, there are 5.7 million registered Palestinian refugees: 17% in the West Bank, and 24.5% in the Gaza Strip, 38.9% registered in Jordan, and 19.6% in Lebanon and Syria. Living conditions for refugees living in the 58 UNRWA camps are very difficult, and for those outside of the West Bank and Gaza Strip residency and citizenship rights are also issues. Israel continues to deny the right of return to the refugees, and resolving the refugee question will be a key part of any negotiated settlement to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

## Scripture: John 19:16-17

“So they took Jesus, <sup>17</sup> and carrying the cross by himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.”

## Reflection

Jesus carried the weight of his cross. The weight of the cross borne by the Palestinians falls heaviest on the refugees – over 2.4 million within the West Bank and Gaza and over 3 million outside – for whom the dispossession of 1948 and 1967 are a daily reality. Like Jesus, they must continue to walk the way of suffering burdened by the cause of their pain.

## Story: Rabee' Sahyoun

My family lived, before 1948, in Haifa, the beautiful coastal port town in Northern Palestine. My father came from a big family who had many lands, and much influence. On the other side, my maternal grandfather worked for Barclay's Bank in Haifa. In 1948, my mother's family lost their house, the deed to which our family still holds, and became internally displaced refugees, by force of the armed units of the Israeli Haganah, and continued thereafter to suffer the consequences of being persecuted and discriminated against in their own country. My family became internally displaced, having escaped Zionist gun fire to towns such as Nazareth in Galilee, while others made their flight to Lebanon under night skies, where they were settled in a town called Damour. Some tried to return to their homes a couple of days, weeks, and even months later, to be turned back by the barrels of Israeli guns at the border. They were forced to start from scratch in exile, with no money, no lands, no titles in their new places of refuge. They have never been given compensation for their losses, nor been allowed to return to their homes, despite persistent attempts for the past 52

years to do so [editor's note: now 76 years]. My father, who is old, will soon die away from the home that was taken from him, and the orchards that ran alongside my Mother's porch, although still ours by international law, are now enjoyed by those who made my parents refugees.<sup>10</sup>

## Prayer

Almighty and merciful God, whose Son became a refugee and had no place to call his own; look with mercy on those who have fled and continue to flee today from danger, homeless and hungry. Bless those who work to bring them relief; inspire generosity and compassion in all our hearts; and guide the nations of the world towards that day when all will rejoice in your Kingdom of justice and of peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

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10 <https://www.palestineremembered.com/Haifa/Haifa/Story244.html>

# Movement 2: Holy Week During the Gaza Genocide

## South Africa and the International Court of Justice: Veronica Wipes Jesus' Face

### Background:

This move by South Africa has been widely celebrated by Palestinians and supporters of freedom and justice worldwide. It underscores South Africa's proactive stance in advocating for the rights and dignity of the Palestinian people, highlighting the country's role as a beacon of hope and a champion for peace and equality on the international stage.

South Africa's courageous step not only reflects its deep-rooted values of solidarity and compassion but also serves as an inspiration to other nations and communities to stand firm in the pursuit of justice and human dignity for all.

### Tradition: Veronica wipes Jesus' face

Station Six commemorates Veronica, a woman from Jerusalem, who according to tradition washed the face of Jesus as he carried the cross to Calvary. When she paused to wipe the blood and sweat off his face with her veil, his image was permanently imprinted on the cloth. While Veronica's veil is a reminder of the compassion of one woman in the face of suffering, the ongoing war on Gaza is a constant reminder of the injustice of the occupation and the ongoing violations of international law.<sup>11</sup>

### Reflection

In authentic worship, people articulate before God their grief, doubts and frustration in candor as they do their praise and thanksgiving. True prayers arise out of the depths of the misery of life under occupation. Palestinians are lifting up prayers not only in the churches and mosques but on the impossible roads of the West Bank and Gaza, as they queue at checkpoints or as they watch a home being demolished and a family become homeless, or as they, young or old, men or women, undergo humiliation by Israeli soldiers in so many situations of oppression. In such moments, God seems to be far away, absent, or unconcerned, and the political burden of tyranny is heavy and intolerable. Some curse and swear; others send out deep sighs of distress and anger, while others lift a silent plea to God to lift the massive load of injustice.

To attempt to offer praise while spending time in grief and lament are what is needed, only compounds the emptiness the worshiper feels and leads to a painful separation between worship and life. The worship that offers strength is a worship that is willing

11 Reflections partially taken from Sabeel's *Contemporary Way of the Cross*, Published in 2015 by Sabeel.



to follow the worshiper down to Sheol and the Pit, to the lowest levels of abandonment. Palestinian Christians receive great solace in the experience of Jesus' disciples on the boat on the Sea of Galilee. The raging sea with the high waves and heavy wind threatened their lives as Jesus lay in the stern asleep. They woke him up saying, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was calm. Then Jesus addressed them saying, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mark 4:35-41).

Today, our experience is like that of the disciples. We are amid a raging sea, being tossed about by the Israeli military that is slowly drowning us. The threats and dangers are immense. In our fear and agony, we boldly address God saying, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" The answer is clear, "Peace! Be still!" and "Do not be afraid, I am with you". This is the assurance that we are clinging to. We know that God is with us in the midst of our struggle against injustice. Let us continue our work together for a just peace.

## Story

Bishop Desmond Tutu is remembered as saying, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." While much of the international community has remained silent or complicit on the side of injustice, we are grateful for the solidarity South Africa has shown to Palestine. May more and more countries, organizations, and movement follow the example of South Africa in the ICJ, forsaking neutrality, and speak up on behalf of the oppressed.

## Prayer

Gracious and Loving God,

We gather in Your presence with hearts full of gratitude, lifting up a prayer of thanksgiving for all those who stand in solidarity with people enduring suffering and injustice. We thank You for their compassion, courage, and commitment to making a difference in a world that yearns for peace and justice.

We are especially grateful for the resilience and strength of individuals from the Global South and nations that have borne the weight of injustice. Their stories of struggle and triumph remind us of Your unwavering presence in adversity and their profound contributions to the global pursuit of dignity and equality for all.

Bless, O Lord, each person who has chosen to stand up against oppression, to speak out against wrongdoing, and to lend their voice to the voiceless. May their actions reflect Your love and bring hope to those who have been marginalized and disenfranchised.

We pray for Your continued guidance and support for these champions of justice, that they may not grow weary in their endeavors. May their efforts bear fruit in creating a more just, compassionate, and equitable world, where every person can live in peace and with dignity.

Inspire us all to join in this sacred work, recognizing our shared humanity and the interconnectedness of our lives. Grant us the wisdom to understand the ways we can contribute to healing and change and give us the courage to act upon that understanding.

May our collective actions serve as a testament to Your boundless love and mercy, and may we never forget the power of solidarity in bringing about transformation and renewal.

In Your Holy Name, we pray, **Amen.**

# People who Carry the Cross: Journalists, Activists, and Advocates

## Background

In the midst of ongoing war, the resilience and dedication of professionals stand as a beacon of hope and determination for the people of the besieged Gaza enclave. Doctors tirelessly working up to 21 hours a day, journalists taking on the roles of rescue workers, and taxis transforming into makeshift ambulances are just a few examples of the extraordinary efforts being made by individuals refusing to yield in the face of adversity.<sup>12</sup>

As Gaza grapples with the devastating impact of an Israeli military offensive—reportedly resulting in over 30,000 casualties, including more than 12,000 children<sup>13</sup>—the commitment of these professionals to serve their community has never been more crucial. Despite facing significant risks to their own safety and experiencing personal losses, their unwavering sense of duty continues to provide essential services and support to those in need.

Furthermore, the international community has also seen a surge of support from lawyers, journalists, and activists working relentlessly to advocate for a cease-fire. These individuals, often opposing their own government's stance to defend human rights, endure substantial personal sacrifices and face significant repercussions for their actions.

This collective effort underscores a powerful commitment to humanity and justice, highlighting the remarkable strength and solidarity of those fighting for peace and the well-being of their communities under the most challenging circumstances.

## Scripture: Luke 23:26

<sup>26</sup> As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus."

## Reflection

Simon of Cyrene's compelled act of carrying Jesus' cross along the Via Dolorosa has transcended its initial appearance of forced servitude, emerging as a powerful symbol of compassion, solidarity, and shared burdens within the Christian faith. This moment, though brief in the narrative of the crucifixion, offers profound lessons on the nature of discipleship and the Christian calling to actively engage with the world's pain and injustice.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2023/1031/Faces-of-heroism-in-Gaza-Doctors-taxi-drivers-journalists>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/>. Last checked on Wednesday, March 13, 2024.

As followers of Christ, we are summoned not just to empathize from afar but to immerse ourselves in the lived realities of those who suffer and are oppressed. Our faith compels us to extend beyond passive sympathy, urging us into concrete actions of solidarity. It is in these acts of kindness, support, and shared struggle that we embody the love of Christ, becoming beacons of hope and agents of change in a world marred by suffering.

The story of Simon of Cyrene reminds us that our journey of faith is not merely about personal salvation but about participating in the broader mission of healing and liberation. By willingly bearing the crosses of others, we affirm their dignity, offer tangible support, and stand against the forces of injustice. This commitment mirrors Jesus' own ministry, which was marked by acts of healing, compassion, and radical solidarity with the marginalized.

Our solidarity in the struggles of others serves not only as a testament to our faith but also as a source of strength and encouragement to those who suffer. The knowledge that they are not alone, that there are individuals across the globe ready to stand with them and support them, can transform a situation of despair into one of hope. It can break down barriers of isolation, creating a sense of community and shared purpose.

In a world where indifference often prevails, the example of Simon of Cyrene challenges us to be present, to act, and to love in the most tangible ways possible. It calls us to recognize that every act of solidarity, no matter how small, is a step towards a more just, compassionate, and humane world. Now more than ever we must commit ourselves to walking and acting in love on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Gaza. Let us then, inspired by Simon's example, commit ourselves to carrying the crosses of our brothers and sisters, knowing that in doing so, we walk the path that Jesus himself walked—a path of love, sacrifice, and redemption.<sup>14</sup>

## Story

Rachel Corrie was a 23-year-old American peace activist from Olympia, Washington, who was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer in Gaza on 16 March 2003, while undertaking nonviolent direct action to protect the home of a Palestinian family from demolition. Since her killing, an enormous amount of solidarity activities have been carried out in her name around the world.

Rachel's journals and emails from her time in Palestine are available in a variety of forms. They have been published in books, turned into plays and dramatic readings, and used around the internet. They are not always reproduced in their entirety and we have collected them here, un-cut, for easier reading. Read Rachel's emails from Palestine:

"I should at least mention that I am also discovering a degree of strength and of basic ability for humans to remain human in the direst of circumstances – which I also haven't seen before. I think the word is dignity. I wish you could meet these people. Maybe, hopefully, someday you will."

– Rachel Corrie, in an email to her mother, February 28 2003

Since the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2023, over 122 journalists and media workers have been killed in Gaza, and many have been injured.<sup>15</sup> We remember the journalist Wael Dahdouh

<sup>14</sup> Reflections partially taken from Sabeel's *Contemporary Way of the Cross*, Published in 2015 by Sabeel.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/gaza-un-experts-condemn-killing-and-silencing-journalists>

whose wife, son, daughter and grandson were killed in the central Gaza strip. Wael and so many other journalists and storytellers in Gaza are now bearing impossible crosses. As demonstrated by Rachel Corrie's story, the cross of journalism, advocacy and solidarity was being carried long before October.

Additionally, the Palestinian Ministry of Culture has reported that 207 archaeological sites and buildings of cultural and historical significance, out of a total of 320, have been reduced to rubble or severely damaged. These include old mosques, churches, cemeteries, museums, libraries, and archives. So far, only a preliminary assessment of the destruction and damage to cultural heritage has been conducted, relying on local eyewitnesses, as well as on international NGOs and satellite images.

## Prayer

Dear Lord,

We lift our hearts to You in gratitude for the compassionate souls who extend Your love to the oppressed. Bless all those who, moved by a profound sense of justice and mercy, dedicate their lives to lifting the burdens of others. Grant them strength, resilience, and unwavering courage as they stand in solidarity with those facing injustice, offering hope and tangible support in their time of need.

Guide their actions with Your wisdom, protect them in their endeavors, and fill them with Your peace, knowing that their labor is not in vain but is a beacon of Your light in this world. May their acts of kindness ripple through the fabric of society, inspiring others to join in a collective effort to uplift the downtrodden and to fight for a world where every person is valued and free.

We pray for the oppressed, especially for the families of journalists who have lost their lives in Gaza while fighting to preserve the truth. Let them know they are not alone and instill in them a hope for a brighter future where the truth will be proclaimed and will prevail over all lies.

In Your name, we pray, **Amen.**

# Cutting of Access to Food, Water, and Electricity: Jesus Nailed to the Cross

## Background

Since October 8, Gaza has found itself ensnared in an unyielding blockade, with Israel severing essential supplies, including water, plunging the region into a dire humanitarian crisis. By October 9, the siege was total, encapsulating the area in isolation from the necessary lifelines of food, water, and electricity. The immediate consequences of these actions prompted alarms from UN independent human rights experts, who flagged the potential for genocide—a concern that gained traction with the International Court of Justice’s preliminary judgment, indicating a plausible case of genocide. The deliberate withholding of essentials, viewed as an orchestrated campaign of starvation by Israel against the Palestinians in Gaza, exacerbates the already grave situation.

The intensity of the conflict, has led to catastrophic human tolls and infrastructural devastation within Gaza. The blockade, coupled with continuous bombardments, has resulted in the deaths of over 30,800 Palestinians and injuries to more than 72,298, alongside widespread destruction. This has pushed 85% of Gaza’s population into displacement, struggling with acute shortages of food, clean water, and medical supplies. With 60% of its infrastructure damaged or destroyed, the region grapples with an existential crisis. The International Court of Justice’s interim ruling in January, mandates Israel to halt such genocidal acts and ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to the civilian population, underlining the severity of Gaza’s plight.

## Scripture: Mark 15:25-39

25 It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.” 27 And with him they crucified two rebels, one on his right and one on his left. 29 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 save yourself, and come down from the cross!” 31 In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

## Reflection

Jesus is nailed to the cross, the most physically grueling method of execution ever devised by man. His body, weak and bleeding from the preceding torture, is broken and crushed by this final act of brutality. In his agony, he cries, “I thirst,” but no water is given to him, only bitter wine and hyssop. In Gaza, countless Palestinians are crying out for water to drink, for sanitation and to meet their basic daily needs.

The current circumstances in Gaza are dire, with despair permeating every corner of the enclave. In the aftermath of the events of October 7th, it appears that a grim resolution has been adopted: to exact a severe toll on all of Gaza as retribution. The humanitarian situation, already teetering on the brink of manageability according to international organizations before this date, has now plummeted into a state of acute crisis. The air is thick with the scent of death, a constant reminder of the relentless violence and the innocent lives lost. Amidst this chaos, the capacity to halt the atrocities seems beyond reach, leaving the community grappling with not only the preservation of life but also the dignity of death. The challenge of finding even a modest parcel of land to lay the fallen to rest underscores the magnitude of the tragedy unfolding. The people of Gaza are caught in a vortex of suffering, with little light visible on the horizon to guide them towards peace and resolution.

## Story

In a harrowing turn of events, more than 100 Palestinians lost their lives, and approximately 700 others sustained injuries when Israeli forces opened fire on a crowd desperate for food aid southwest of Gaza City. This tragedy unfolded against the backdrop of a severe famine threatening the beleaguered enclave.

Gathered on al-Rashid Street, hopeful individuals awaited the arrival of aid trucks rumored to be carrying flour. Amidst this dire anticipation, Al Jazeera broadcasted heart-wrenching footage depicting the aftermath, with dozens of casualties being loaded onto trucks due to the inaccessibility of ambulances.

A witness recounted the chilling moment: "We went to get flour. The Israeli army shot at us. There are many martyrs on the ground, and we are still trying to retrieve them. There's no first aid available."

Al Jazeera's Ismail al-Ghoul reported from the scene that, following the shooting, Israeli tanks proceeded to roll over the bodies of both the deceased and the wounded. "It is a massacre," he declared, emphasizing the extreme starvation risks faced by the citizens of Gaza.

## Prayer

Lord Christ, you tell us that you are the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35). We come before you shocked, disgusted, and lost. We plead that you provide the people of Gaza their daily bread while so many are starving. Lord, intervene and stop these atrocities which kill people even as they wait for aid. Provide aid to our oppressors who are sick spiritually, morally, and politically.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Pray for the flour massacre, from *Sabeel Wave of Prayer*, March 8, 2024.

# Rafah and Ongoing Genocide: “My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me”

Humanitarian agencies and human rights organizations are expressing alarm over the dire situation in Rafah, Gaza, where 1.5 million people, including over half a million children, are facing extreme peril. With the threat of an Israeli ground offensive looming, there is a risk of massive civilian casualties and a complete halt to the already limited humanitarian aid. The forced displacement of the majority of Gaza’s population into Rafah, combined with plans for a military attack on the area, could lead to catastrophic outcomes. Infrastructure damage, non-operational hospitals, scarcity of food, water, shelter, and sanitation have pushed people into inhumane living conditions. The potential war crimes stem from the systematic forcible transfer of civilians and the denial of essential services needed for survival. Despite an International Court of Justice ruling demanding Israel to facilitate humanitarian aid, the situation has worsened, highlighted by devastating airstrikes. The call for an immediate and permanent cease-fire is critical as continued military actions impede humanitarian efforts and the international community’s silence and support further exacerbate Gaza’s crisis. Urgent appeals are made for the cessation of arms supply to Israel, the establishment of a permanent cease-fire, the protection of civilian lives, and unimpeded access for humanitarian aid and workers, emphasizing the global legal and moral obligations to uphold international law and protect civilians. The situation in northern Gaza is also dire with cases of death among children due to starvations [being] reported.<sup>17</sup>

## Scripture: Matthew 27:46

Jesus’ cry, “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me”.

## Reflection

As Jesus experienced abandonment and despair, so too do the people of Rafah, where 1.5 million displaced individuals feel a profound sense of helplessness. With Israel’s threat to advance into Rafah, men, women, children, and the injured—who are already enduring great suffering—find themselves with nowhere to seek refuge. The situation is dire, and hope for intervention fades amidst the escalating crisis.

## Story

The El-Amal Rehabilitation Society in Rafah, nestled within a serene courtyard adorned with trees and a children’s play area, is buzzing with activity more than ever before. This vibrant hub, typically alive with the chatter and laughter of deaf students, has become a sanctuary for families seeking refuge from the ongoing violence in Gaza.

Many of the deaf children and youth who are part of the El-Amal Society’s educational programs hail from Rafah itself. While some have been fortunate enough to remain in their homes, others have not been so lucky, their residences destroyed in the conflict. These children have quickly adapted, welcoming new families into the building and

17 [Urgent statement from Chief Executives of humanitarian agencies and human rights organizations on Rafah, Gaza - Amnesty International](#)

helping them navigate their way to essential services like markets, shops, pharmacies, and healthcare facilities.

The small but dedicated team at El-Amal, led by project manager Bahaa Abu Batnin, is grateful for the support of these students. Their resilience and willingness to help have been a beacon of hope and comfort for the displaced, creating a sense of home amidst the chaos. The students have been instrumental in integrating the newcomers, even recruiting some to assist with cleaning, cooking, and organizing activities for the children.

Currently, El-Amal is home to over 600 individuals, with some rooms housing more than 20 people. The team faces daily challenges in providing for everyone, relying on financial and in-kind donations. Resourcefulness has been key, with team members bringing supplies from their own homes to meet the urgent need for mattresses and blankets during Gaza's cold winter.

However, the struggle for basic necessities continues. The society can only afford to provide a modest meal once a day per person, and the broader water crisis in Gaza limits them to just five cups of water per week for each individual. Additionally, the team prioritizes the distribution of "dignity bags," containing sanitary pads, painkillers, and other essential items, to all displaced women and girls, highlighting their commitment to preserving dignity in dire times.<sup>18</sup>

## Prayer

Dear Lord of Mercy and Love,

We come before You with heavy hearts, bearing the pain and suffering of our brothers and sisters in Gaza, who are facing the unbearable reality of surrendering to death amidst conflict and despair. In their darkest moments, when hope seems like a distant memory, we pray that Your light guides them through the shadows.

Grant them peace, O Lord, Let them feel Your presence, a comforting embrace in their time of need. May their spirits find solace in Your eternal love, and may their journey from this world be met with Your divine mercy.

We pray for the families and loved ones left behind, engulfed in grief and mourning. Provide them with strength to endure their loss, and fill their hearts with Your unending grace, that they may find healing in Your promise of a life beyond this earthly realm.

Lord, we also pray for an end to the suffering and violence that plague the people of Gaza. Inspire the hearts and minds of leaders and communities around the world to seek peace, justice, and reconciliation. Help us to remember the value of every human life and to act with compassion and empathy towards our fellow beings.

In these moments of sorrow, help us all to cling to the hope that comes from faith in You. May we work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of those in need, guided by Your example of unconditional love and forgiveness.

In Your Holy Name, we pray, **Amen**



# Engineered Famine: Jesus' Death

On March 9, The New York Times published the following summary of famine in Gaza:<sup>18</sup>

Aid groups have warned that deaths from malnutrition-related causes have only just begun for Gaza's more than two million people. Five months into Israel's campaign against Hamas and its siege of Gaza, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are close to starvation, United Nations officials say. Almost no aid has reached northern Gaza for weeks, after major U.N. agencies mostly suspended their operations, citing mass looting of their cargoes by desperate Gazans, Israeli restrictions on convoys and the poor condition of roads damaged during the war.

At least 20 Palestinian children have died from malnutrition and dehydration, according to Gaza health officials. Like Yazan, who required medicines that were in acutely short supply in Gaza, many of those who died also suffered from health conditions that further placed their lives at risk, health officials said.

"It's often that a child is extremely malnourished, and then they get sick and that virus is ultimately what causes that death," said Heather Stobaugh, a malnutrition expert at Action Against Hunger, an aid group. "But they would not have died if they were not malnourished."

Gaza health officials said that two of the children who died from malnutrition were less than 2 days old. While cautioning that it was difficult to say what had happened without more information, Dr. Stobaugh said that malnutrition in pregnant mothers and the lack of formula could easily have led to the deaths of infants, who are the most vulnerable to extreme malnutrition.

That dovetailed with an account given by an aid group, ActionAid, which said that a doctor at Al-Awda maternity hospital in northern Gaza had told the group that malnourished mothers were giving birth to stillborn children.

## Scripture: John 19:30

"When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

## Story

Anwar Abdul Nabi sits on the brink of despair at Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza, her eyes deeply etched with sorrow. In her arms, she cradles the lifeless fingers of her daughter, Mila, a 3-year-old who has just succumbed to starvation. "My daughter has been embraced by God's mercy, falling victim to the severe shortage of essential nutrients like calcium, potassium, and oxygen, tears streaming down her face as she leaned on an elderly relative for support. "Her health plummeted suddenly—she hadn't been consuming iron-rich foods or her daily eggs since the war began. Now, we've lost her."

The dire situation in Gaza, exacerbated by Israel's stringent control over aid, has left many displaced Palestinians in a desperate struggle to nourish their children. According to doctors, starving mothers find themselves unable to breastfeed, while distraught parents seek out overwhelmed health facilities in hopes of securing infant formula. Relief workers report significant weight loss among civilians, a testament to the severity of the crisis. In northern Gaza, the infrequent arrival of humanitarian aid

sparks frantic scrambles for assistance. However, health workers are at a breaking point, unable to provide life-saving care in the face of a medical system crippled by bombardment and siege.<sup>19</sup>

## Meditation

In the Greek language, “epiousios” refers to the “daily bread,” which can be interpreted in various ways—either as the physical sustenance consumed daily, the spiritual nourishment found in communion, or even the provision for the days ahead. Regardless of interpretation, the urgent need for sustenance in all its forms remains a pressing reality for many around the world, especially people in Gaza.

Food is an essential requirement for sustaining life. In Palestine, as in many countries worldwide, it plays a central role in joyous occasions such as religious holidays, weddings and baptisms, as well as somber events like funerals. Food should never be wielded as a weapon of war. Providing aid to those in need, particularly those facing starvation, must be approached with dignity and compassion. Being deprived of food due to poverty and injustice, akin to the situation depicted in the biblical story of Lazarus and the rich man, is a form of suffering that goes against the values of justice and compassion upheld by God. It is a sin born out of societal negligence and moral failing, one that God does not tolerate.

Fasting, as a deliberate choice to abstain from eating, is a powerful expression of faith. Jesus and his disciples fasted, demonstrating spiritual discipline and devotion. Similarly, political prisoners often embark on hunger strikes as a form of nonviolent protest. In these contexts, food is regarded as a temptation to be resisted in pursuit of higher spiritual or moral principles. Abstaining from food by choice makes your faith and spirit stronger.

Today, in Gaza, many still suffer from hunger and thirst. While food may be readily available across borders, yet accessing it requires abandoning one’s own home and country. Food is stuck at the borders on aid trucks but military permits and political decisions are not allowing it in. Food has become a means of stripping people of their dignity.

## Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hear us from the depths where we lay, just like Lazarus once did. Your name is a beacon of hope for the weary and the wronged. May Your kingdom of fairness and love unfold around us, even in the darkest corners of despair.

Guide us, Lord, towards a world where all are seen and heard, where the hungry are fed, and the forgotten are remembered. Give us today, and every day, the bread we need to survive, not just food for our bodies but nourishment for our souls and justice for our spirits.

Forgive us for the times we’ve overlooked our neighbors, for the moments we’ve passed by Lazarus at our gates. Teach us to forgive those who remain indifferent to our suffering, as You teach us to notice and act.

Lead us away from the indifference that hardens hearts, and deliver us from the injustice that keeps Lazarus at the gate. For Yours is a kingdom where love reigns supreme, the power to uplift the downtrodden, and the glory of a world remade in justice and peace. Amen.

19 [https://edition.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-03-05-24/h\\_890a3417ce6abc129ca-da6d2a5ee0e29?gsid=4574e90a-81d9-4d88-8307-ee1dd40ccb99](https://edition.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-03-05-24/h_890a3417ce6abc129ca-da6d2a5ee0e29?gsid=4574e90a-81d9-4d88-8307-ee1dd40ccb99)

# 31,000 killed: The Burial of Jesus

## Background

Gaza's health ministry reports a staggering death toll of over 30,000<sup>20</sup> due to the conflict, with thousands more unaccounted for, trapped under rubble or hastily buried. Amidst this, Gaza's system for counting the dead is overwhelmed, relying on partial hospital data and media reports for estimates, especially in areas under Israeli control. The situation is further complicated by communication blackouts, disrupting data collection. Notably, the death count primarily includes those directly killed in attacks, omitting victims of indirect impacts such as inadequate medical care or hunger. Additionally, the exact number of militants among the casualties remains unclear, with Israel claiming over 10,000 fighter deaths without detailed evidence.

## Scripture: Luke 23:50-56

50 Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph who, though a member of the council, 51 had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. 52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. 54 It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning.[o] 55 The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments.

## Reflection

The Arabic word for Good Friday is jum'a al hazini which means "Sad Friday". Sad Friday denotes the situation of Christ on that Friday two thousand years ago: Christ had been humiliated, condemned, and crucified as a criminal. His disciples were all disheartened, scattered to the four winds, and broken in spirit. They had abandoned their Lord and Master, who seemed to have betrayed their hopes of a glorious kingdom which was heralded by his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It represented the depth of despair for the apparent victory of the forces of evil, oppression and hypocrisy. The Romans, the foreign occupiers, had collaborated with the local political and religious leadership to crush the fresh voice of the prophet from Nazareth. All hope seemed to have been abandoned. Palestinians are living today in the "Sad Friday" period of their history. Never before did their situation seem as desperate as it is now. People correctly point out that their current situation is worse than it has ever been. Even the most optimistic Palestinian is now feeling a deep sense of depression and despair, as what looked like the beginnings of statehood, freedom, and self-determination, has been turned into an abysmal combination of Bantustans and a silent international community. Yet precisely in this dark hour of despair, the message of Easter needs to be proclaimed again: Christ will not remain in the tomb, nor will evil and oppression have the last word. Christ rose again on the third day with a glorious triumph over the forces of evil

<sup>20</sup> As of March 12, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports a death toll in Gaza of at least 30,228.

See [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory | Home Page \(ochaopt.org\)](https://www.ochaopt.org/)

and darkness, and over death itself, proclaiming to the whole world a new era and the victory of good over evil. The message of Easter, for Palestinians, as well as for the poor and oppressed everywhere, is that God is sovereign in the affairs of this world. No matter how dark things appear to be on "Sad Friday," Easter is coming and with it the promise, hope and certainty of resurrection, a new beginning, and the victory of life over death.<sup>21</sup>

## Story

Eman Abuseaid, the mother trying to protect her son and daughter in October, fled her home in Gaza City several days into the war. She sought refuge in her parents' apartment in the central area of Nuseirat, where she sheltered with her husband and kids, siblings and young nieces and nephews. "It's a horrible, horrible, horrible things to see here in Gaza," she told NPR before evacuating her home. "I try to make my kids safe."

On Oct. 31, Israeli warplanes targeted the five-story building the family was in. Eman, 40, was killed. So were her husband and children. In all, 23 members of the family lost their lives in the attack. Only one person in the apartment survived, a younger sister whose six children were among those killed, according to relatives who confirmed the details.

Relatives say Eman's husband, Iyad, her brother, Mahmoud, her son, Ziyad, and three other children in the family are still missing under the rubble. Their bodies were never recovered. Deaths like theirs are mostly excluded from the health ministry's casualty figures. Around seven weeks into the war, the Gaza health ministry said at least 6,800 people were missing under the rubble. That figure has not been officially updated since. The latest reports only say that "a large number of victims are still under the rubble and on the roads."

## Prayer

Meditation from Leonardo Boff:

"Everything grows quiet in the face of death. Fighting and conflict cease. A corpse, even when it is mangled and rejected, imposes holy respect and reverent silence. We are confronted with a mystery. Every death leaves behind an open question. We wait and look for the glimmer of some light that will dispel all the shadows surrounding the mystery of life. Death should not be the last word on life, nor despair the final state of human beings. History does not cherish the memory of those who killed. Rather than holding despots up as an example, it exalts the courage of those who endured death, who shouldered the sufferings of the lowly, and who undertook liberating revolutions. Taken down lifeless from the cross, Jesus paves the way for others to pick up his banner and carry it forward. They are the people who have come to understand what God's project is: the establishment of a world where all will finally be brothers and sisters, and children of the same Father, in justice, liberty and love."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> From Sabeel's Contemporary Way of the Cross, Published 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Contemporary Way of the Cross, Sabeel.

# Resurrection

The resurrection offers hope amidst despair, reminding us of the transformative power of love and justice that God offers. As we celebrate Easter, we renew our commitment to building a world where all can experience the fullness of life and dignity.

## Scripture: John 20:1-18

"20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus's head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to their homes."

## Reflection

In Jerusalem, just before Palm Sunday, Christians embark on a pilgrimage to the city on the Saturday of Lazarus. This day we celebrate the story of Lazarus's resurrection, closely linked to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Palestine, we are surrounded by a pervasive sense of death, reminiscent of Lazarus's sisters. In our prayers, we echo Martha's plea to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died."

Here, the prevailing sounds are of weapons and the cries of women and children mourning their lost loved ones. Many among us feel that God is silent, echoing Rev. Munther Isaac's words from his Christmas sermon in Bethlehem, suggesting that God is buried under the rubble.

Could it be that God's silence is tied to the emptiness of the grave? Perhaps we have been seeking God in the wrong places, near an empty tomb where Jesus no longer resides. Our scriptures and liturgies claim, he is not there, Jesus is risen! God is present among the people worldwide who are advocating for peace, urging world leaders to agree to a ceasefire. Jesus has moved from the rubble to the streets, raising his voice for peace, yet the powerful seem deaf to his calls as the empty grave is deaf to our prayer.

At Christmas, we envisioned the infant Jesus buried under debris, but this Easter, he is seen marching through streets globally, demanding an end to conflict and evil, and calling upon corrupt leaders to change their ways. Christ is Risen, and all who protest and refuse to remain silent are a witness to this.

## Story

Palestinian writer and professor Refaat Alareer, was killed in an airstrike by the Israeli military on December 6, along with his brother, his brother's son, his sister and her three children. Refaat's poem "If I Must Die" has been shared widely since he was killed.

**“IF I MUST DIE”****BY REFAAT ALAREER**

If I must die,  
 you must live  
 to tell my story  
 to sell my things  
 to buy a piece of cloth  
 and some strings,  
 (make it white with a long tail)  
 so that a child, somewhere in Gaza  
 while looking heaven in the eye  
 awaiting his dad who left in a blaze—  
 and bid no one farewell  
 not even to his Besh  
 not even to himself—  
 sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above  
 and thinks for a moment an angel is there  
 bringing back love  
 If I must die  
 let it bring hope  
 let it be a tale

**Meditation**

Easter embodies a profound message: what seems insurmountable can indeed be overcome, emphasizing the importance of steadfast faith. It commemorates the resurrection of Jesus, a testament to the victory of life over death. Yet, in contemporary times, our faith is tested. As we observe the suffering of individuals in Gaza, maintaining hope becomes a challenge.

Our quest for stories of hope amidst the backdrop of ongoing genocide and destruction often ends in vain. We struggle to find narratives that genuinely encapsulate hope amid such despair. Genuine hope seems scarce, and at times, the search feels premature amidst the grieving and compassion that the current moment demands. Let us first acknowledge and process our grief. Solidarity and condolences offer a beacon of light to those engulfed in sorrow. By bearing one another's burdens, we forge a path through our collective pain, navigating our way toward healing and resilience.

Amid the shadows of war and devastation, we hold onto the belief that this is not the conclusion but a chapter yet to unfold, where hope remains to be unearthed. This quest for hope, perhaps, is a journey we must embark on together, even though it feels absent and unshared in our current reality.

It may be up to us to become the beacon of hope in its apparent absence. The critical question is whether we have the bravery to seek out hope, to approach the tomb, despite the obstacles that stand in our way, as the women approached the tomb despite the Roman soldiers'.

Maybe an earthquake is required that will shake the foundations and clear the path forward. In this context, the question arises: what could challenge the barriers imposed on a cease-fire in Gaza, allowing us to witness a resurrection of spirit and hope? Perhaps it is within us, the collective, to initiate this transformative movement.

## Prayer

Gracious and Loving God, who anointed Your Son Jesus in the synagogue to proclaim good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed, inspire us through Your Holy Spirit as we remember our baptismal vows.

In the waters of baptism, we were clothed with Your grace, called to follow in the footsteps of Christ, to live as bearers of Your light and love. Empower us, O Lord, to embody the virtues of goodness and neighborliness, reflecting Your boundless compassion in our actions and in our being.

Guide us to seek justice in all corners of the world, to use our voices for those who are silenced, our strength for those who are weak, and our resources for those in need. Help us to be instruments of peace, to reconcile where there is division, to heal where there is hurt, and to spread hope where there is despair.

Remind us daily of our commitment to serve rather than be served, to give rather than take, and to love unconditionally as You have loved us. May our lives be a testament to Your transformative power, bringing about Your kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray for the courage to live out our baptismal promises, to be the light in darkness, the salt in blandness, and the leaven in society. May we always walk in the way of Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life for the life of the world.

Amen.