

View from the VICARAGE



Dear Friends,

As some of you know I have just come back from fulfilling a life time's ambition to visit the Holy Land. A couple of hours into the flight to Israel, just after

the lunch had been brought round, we experienced turbulence like I have never known it. This perhaps was a preparation for the whole trip! I certainly experienced emotional turbulence at some of the sights, people I met and stories I heard. I had gone with a charity called Amos Trust and our trip was both a pilgrimage and a chance to meet the people of Palestine and hear from some of the partner organisations that Amos Trust works with.

Amos Trust was founded 25 years ago by Garth Hewitt. It endeavours to link up with the Palestinian community and Jewish peacemakers to hear their stories, stand alongside them in their suffering and support their work. It aims to encourage them and to educate people in the UK about the realities on the ground and to work for justice and peace.

For the last 20 years Amos has worked in partnership with a wide number of Jewish, Muslim and Christian peace groups, from Israel, Palestine, the UK and North America. It seeks to raise awareness of the devastating impact of: the wall, settlement blocks and travel restrictions upon Palestinian life, particularly within the Bethlehem area.

The first week of our stay, we were in Bethlehem, in a Palestinian run hotel which was excellent. There wasn't much sign of the "little town" we sing about at Christmas, it's a big city. Neither is the "how still we see thee lie" an accurate description of this place suffering terribly from the Israeli Occupation. The wall or separation barrier snakes around Bethlehem, in some parts separating Palestinian from Palestinian and so making a nonsense of the Israeli claim that it's route is to do with security. We were able to travel through the check points to Jerusalem and back, but most Palestinians living in Bethlehem cannot (although Jerusalem is only 5 miles away).

The situation is a complex one but with people driven by fear on both sides, but to see the injustice being experienced by the Palestinian people at the hands of the Israelis, close up was deeply disturbing. Even more disturbing is the way we in the West have in the main ignored their plight.

Throughout my time there I developed a heightened awareness of the fact that Jesus lived under occupation (Roman Occupation). This was something I had known in theory but I felt I began to understand something of what must have been like and the way the occupation affects

every part of Palestinian life.

We visited Jerusalem, Hebron, the Judean desert and the last few days we stayed in Nazareth. We met many wonderful people - Palestinians and Israelis - some of faith and some of none.

I think for me the high point of the whole trip was by the Sea of Galilee. There where Jesus first called those fishermen to leave their nets, and follow him, and where after the resurrection they were told to go and he would meet them there, felt a very special place. Yet somehow it was there also that I realised afresh you don't need to go to Galilee to hear his call, whenever we are willing to emerge from our comfort zones and step out in trust, He will be there.

Liz Cannon

Resources

Amos Trust. Supporting local peacemakers in their vision of peace and justice for all. <http://www.amostrust.org>

A Just Peace for Palestine. A campaign for all those who support a just peace in Palestine/Israel. <http://www.justpeaceforpalestine.org>

B'Tselem - The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. Established in 1989 by a group of prominent academics, attorneys, journalists, and Knesset members. It endeavors to document and educate the Israeli public and policymakers about human rights violations in the Occupied Territories, combat the phenomenon of denial prevalent among the Israeli public, and help create a human rights culture in Israel. <http://www.btselem.org>

Holy Land Trust: <http://www.holylandtrust.org>

Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions: <http://www.icahd.org>

The Palestinian News Network: <http://english.pnn.ps>

Friends of Sabeel: Working for Justice and Peace in Palestine: <http://www.friendsofsabeel.org.uk>

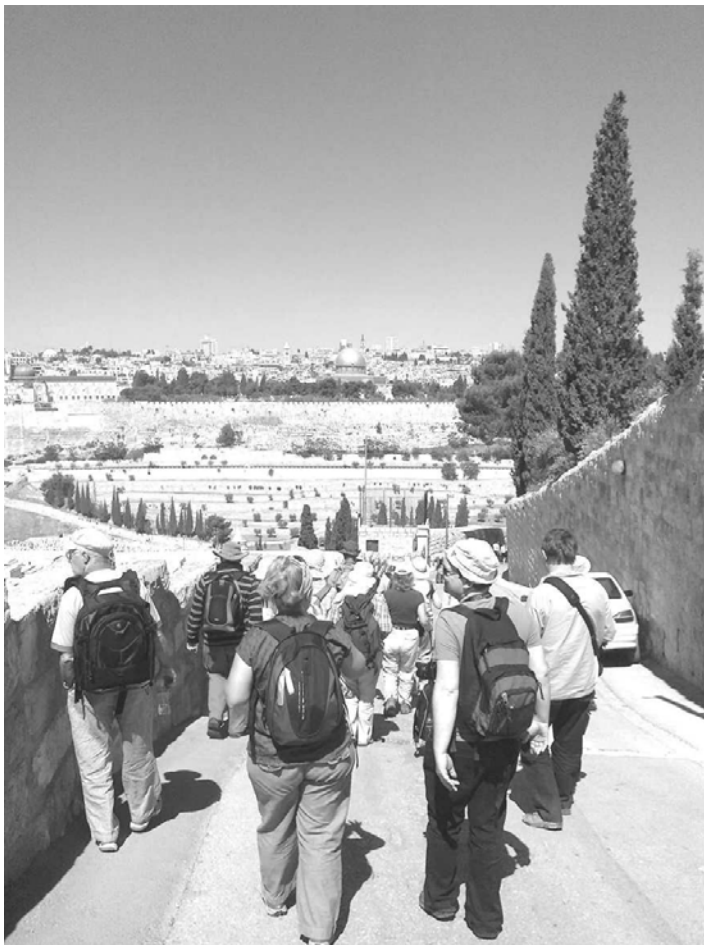
The President and Vice President of the Methodist Conference visited Hebron: "I was told to expect my heart to be broken during our visit. It happened yesterday in Hebron." <http://methodist-presandvp.blogspot.com/2010/02/hebron.html>

Mark Thomas Extended tour - "EXTREME RAMBLING - Walking The Wall" - Glastonbury, Edinburgh, Reading, Leeds and Greenbelt festivals: <http://www.markthomasinfo.co.uk> Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrxRJ4VEXdl>

The Beauty of Palestine: the Land of the Bible comes alive



The view over Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives



Palm Sunday route walking down from the Mount of Olives



Gethsemane - the olive grove where Jesus prayed and was betrayed



Sculpture depicting Jesus reinstating and commissioning Peter



By the Sea of Galilee



Beduin life in the desert

Team Times

The Reality of Palestinian Life under Occupation



Banksy's Bethlehem Peace Dove (with bullet proof vest) decorates the ugly Separation Barrier surrounding Bethlehem



First sight of Aida Refugee Camp.

The symbolic key at the entrance is a potent reminder of the treasured villages and homes from which they were driven



Latest section of the Separation Wall



A child's shoe in the rubble - tragic evidence of a previous house demolition



Work party helping to get the house at Al Walajah finished



Blowing bubbles with a Palestinian child at the house

The House at Al Walajah

This Palestinian house was destroyed by Israeli forces seven years ago.

It has recently been rebuilt by Amos volunteers, and we spent a day helping there, only to hear that it is due to be demolished again.

So this family who currently live in a refugee camp will see their house demolished for a second time.

Alistair Burt recently visited the village and is aware of the situation.



One of the many checkpoints.

I met a Palestinian woman in Hebron who had lost two babies because of the delays in getting through a checkpoint to hospital.

According to Israeli Human Rights group B'Tselem, between 2000 and 2009 there were 72 Palestinians deaths related to delays receiving medical care because of checkpoints.



During 2010 Mark Thomas walked the entire length of the Israeli Separation Barrier, crossing between the Israeli and the Palestinian side.

This is the story of 300,000 settlers, a 750 km wall, six arrests, one stoning, too much hummus and one simple question...

'Good fences make good neighbours, but what about bad ones?'

The Israeli barrier is probably the most iconic divider of land since the Berlin Wall. It has been declared illegal under international law and its impact on life in the West Bank has been enormous.

Mark was tear-gassed, stoned, sunburned, rained on and hailed on. But thankfully he was also welcomed and looked after by Israelis and Palestinians – from farmers and soldiers to smugglers and zookeepers – earning a unique insight of the real Middle East in all its entrenched and yet life-affirming glory.