

It's Complicated... War (and Peace) in the Holy Land

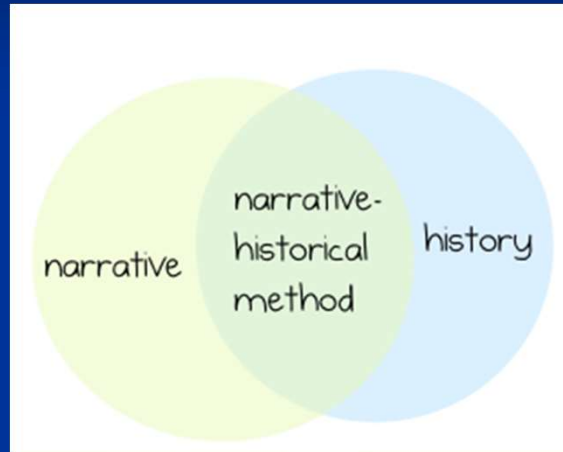
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Saint Mark's Cathedral
October 30, 2023



First Question: What are your hopes and expectations of tonight's gathering?

Flow and Content of the Evening

- Brief historical reflection situated within the narrative theologies of the people affected by the conflict
- Not a binary reality—it's complicated
- Compassion grounded in our theological virtues is key
- Lament in the face of violence and suffering is sacred work!



Narrative theology seeks to use the lens of our stories to understand the history behind them, and vice versa

Lamentation

“Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow...” (Lam. 1:11-12)

Set in the Babylonian Exile 6th C BCE, but how timely last week this reading appeared in the Daily Office. This passage is also used liturgically during Holy Week.

The Existential Fear of Anti-Semitism is Real



history of pogroms

Share file (of history of anti-semitism).

Fear is real, deeply seated, understandably reactive when it happens again and again

Photos: 12th C expulsion of Jews from France

Modern day US

October 7 assault on Israeli Jews



Checked in last week with Rabbi Wiener—the experience is one of embodied trauma, blood memory, systemic assault on all Jews, not just Israel
Fight back is the recourse.

Israel's Response

- Stated Objective: destruction of Hamas as terroristic threat to nation of Israel
- Urban warfare is always problematic
- Siege leads to suffering of all present



I've also talked with Fr. Fadi Diab of Ramallah, Anglican priest who preached at Saint Mark's last July—he said the current war elicits embodied trauma, outrage, weariness—see this response as systemic assault on all Palestinians, not just Hamas soldiers. Children are dying, hunger and fear are real...

Lamentation

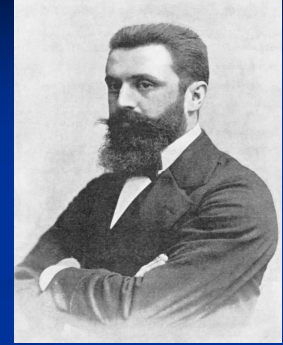
- “All her people groan as they search for bread...is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow...” (Lam. 1:11-12)

Narrative theology offers hermeneutic (interpretive lens) for scripture to apply to different people at different time. How do we hear the story and situate ourselves in it?
From the Exile to suffering in Gaza now.

How did we get here? next slide

Modern-day Zionist Movement

- Late 19th Century—Theodor Hertzl
- Core mission: re-establish an independent nation of Israel
- Not monolithic, not all expansionist, not all racially discriminatory
- After Holocaust in WWII, movement gains momentum
- 1948 War of Independence claims land in Palestine
- 1949 “Green Line” of armistice



Zion is name for holy hill in Jerusalem. Replete references in Scripture (OT and NT)
 Modern appropriation to intend free nation of Israel in the HL, centered on Jerusalem.
 War to claim this new nation post WWII (Shoah fresh on their minds, fight now is the prevailing orientation)
 Religious and political merge—justified by 1) scriptural interpretation of right to the land, and 2) victimization demands reparations by way of the land.

Zionist at Western Wall

Next slide—a different take on the events of history...

Nakba

- Israel's War of Independence is known to Palestinians as the Nakba (Catastrophe).
- 15,000 Palestinians were killed, many non-combatants
- 500 Palestinian villages destroyed
- 750,000 were forced to flee their homes (~80% of the population at the time)
- At end of war, only 22% of pre-war land was still held by Palestinians



The key to their homes became holy symbols of "right to return" but Israel has never acknowledged that right for Palestinians.

As recourse for the Nakba, 1 million Jews were expelled from Muslim countries across the Middle East

Seeds of conflict sown heavily into the land

Two-state solution proposed

- 1947—first attempt: Israel was formed, but not Palestinian state (Jordan and Egypt had what was left)
- 1967—Six Day War—Israel took control of Gaza, West Bank (including East Jerusalem)
- 1993—Oslo Accords—Palestinian government for West Bank and Gaza (but areas A, B and C established)
- 2009—Netanyahu returns as PM, cools to peace talks, continues development of settlements
- 2017—US “peace plan” unravels after US embassy moves to Jerusalem; PA loses confidence in US as mediator; settlements in occupied West Bank expand dramatically



areas under Palestinian administration and security (“Area A”), areas under Palestinian administration but joint Israeli-Palestinian security (“Area B”), and areas under Israeli administration and security (“Area C”).
Palestinians are not allowed in Area C...their land has continued to whittle down

Radical factions on both sides have also fought against two-state solution—Yitsak Rabin assassinated by Jewish radicals; Hamas radicals began wave of suicide bombings in 2000s.

Israel/Palestine



“Occupied West Bank” under Israeli control.

After suicide bombings in second intifada and following, Separation Wall was constructed, often cutting off Palestinian commutes to work, families, holy sites.

Wall was supposed to roughly follow the Green Line, but more than 80% of the wall cuts into Palestinian areas, causing great suffering (and great frustration)

Expanding Jewish Settlements in Occupied West Bank—now more than 600,000 settlers have taken more land, making two-state solution even more challenging (no clear boundary—intentional obfuscation)

Conflict between settlers and Palestinians—both have turned to violence as justifiable recourse.

Settler Violence in West Bank



Nonviolence is still a response: Daoud Nassar is a friend from Bethlehem. He is Palestinian. Family farm (Daher's vineyard) for more than 100 years. Have deed documents from 1920s from British (after Ottoman fall), but Israel does not recognize them. In 1991, Israel declared the farm land to be state land. Still in court case, but family is fighting for their homestead and livelihood. Five settlements now surround the farm, and thousands of olive trees have been cut or bull-dozed by settlers and IDF, and Nassar family members have been attached and injured. They continue to espouse non-violent response. Motto: "We refuse to be enemies."

2018-Israel's "Jewish Nation-State Law"

- The law did principally three things:
 - "The right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people."
 - Hebrew becomes "official language of the state." Arabic no longer shared that status after 70 years.
 - mandates that the "state views Jewish settlement as a national value and will labor to encourage and promote its establishment and development," without specifying where.

John Kerry famously said: Israel can be a Jewish State or a democracy, but not both...

Three classes of citizens in place of two-state solution:

Israeli Jews—rights are protected by the state, top of hierarchy

Israeli Arabs—are citizens by birth location, have right to vote, are restricted on where they can live, work, etc.

Palestinians in Israel-controlled West Bank and East Jerusalem—cannot vote, restricted in many aspects of life, economically hardshipped. Schools, health, work all suffer.

Why Gaza? Why Now?



- 81% of the 2.1 million current residents in Gaza are refugees or descendants of refugees from the Nakba
- Half are children; all are impoverished due to an embargo
- Israel refuses their claim to “right of return” (Egypt denies them entry also)
- Hamas takes political control of Gaza in 2007, has charter which calls for the explicit destruction of the nation of Israel
- Israel imposed sweeping restrictions and a blockade on Gazans— “open air prison”

Since 2007, Israel embargo/blockade has contributed to severe poverty, desperation.

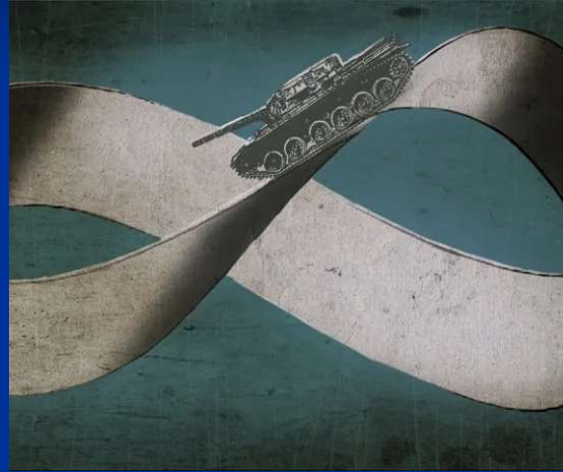
Refugees fleeing further



Now refugees are fleeing further in attempt to avoid the violence.
Suhaila Tarazi is Director of Al Ahli hospital in Gaza, in hiding in central Gaza currently.
Attempting to keep hospital going.

Just War Theory

- Ethical premise: war cannot be first response but may be the best response given the situation (right and necessary, even if not good)
- Guided by certain principles
 - Jus ad bellum—decision to go to war
 - Jus in bellum—how to wage war ethically
 - No malum in se—avoid evils of war
 - Jus post bellum—how to rebuild and heal after war



Jus ad bellum

Competent authority—political entity with commitment to justice

Probability of success

Last resort

Just cause

Jus in bellum

Distinction—spare non-combatants whenever possible while striking military targets

Proportionate response

Militarily necessary

No malum in se: war crimes (rape, forced fighting, indiscriminate use of weapons (NBC warfare))

Jus post bellum: peace, restoration, recovery, reparations, war crime tribunals

War Crimes and the Laws of War

- Evolved over time, guided by international treaties and UN Declaration of Human Rights
- A long list that includes:
 - Torture, inhumane treatment, unnecessary killing, forced fighting
 - Taking hostages, direct attacks against civilians, using civilians as shields
 - Rape, sexual slavery, pillage, use of child soldiers
 - Use of indiscriminate weapons—nuclear, biological, chemical

Summary

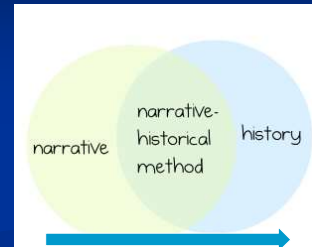
- It's complicated...
- Nothing occurs in a vacuum or disconnected from the long history
- Violence in the region is not new
- Reality on the ground is guided by geopolitical "chess game"—every move is informed by some justification for it and some prospect of shifting the balance of power
- Meanwhile, people suffer
- Peace is still possible



Archbishop Hosam reminds us that the Land of the Holy One is precious with people, and that God is active even when we cannot readily see or make sense of it. Jerusalem is the City of Resurrection which gives us hope.

Breakout Group Conversations

- I feel sorrow/grief for _____
- I feel compassion for _____
- I lament _____
- I hope/yearn for _____



- Avoid statements that begin “those (people)...”
- Avoid statements that involved “they should/should not...”
- Avoid being the expert in the room...

Narrative theology

A Holistic Approach to Conversations

1. What word do we have to share into the mix?
2. Know your story first, and be ready to tell it—narrative theology
3. Humility is a virtue
4. Activism without Sabbath (contemplative reflection) is folly
5. Do spiritual strength training (prayer, centering, media mgmt., etc.)
6. Remember this is not the only conversation you will have
7. Be kind to yourself, compassionate with others
8. Do more spiritual strength training

Adapted from Christena Cleveland

Consider your news sources and content



- Avoid traumatizing images and videos—they take their toll
- Lament, pray, hope...
- Practice the virtues of faith, hope and love—where is God in all this? Where would Christ show up? What would Christ have to say? What would Christ have you say/do?
- Resist the impulse to violence (in thought, word or deed)
- Beware of US media outlets—consider BBC, Haaretz, Al-Jazeera

Closing Reflection & Prayer, Richard Rohr

- If there is nothing in your life to cry about, if there is nothing to complain about, if there is nothing in your life to yell about, you must be out of touch. We must all feel and know the pain of humanity. The free space that God leads us into is to feel the full spectrum, from great exultation and joy, to the pain of mourning and dying and suffering. It's called the Paschal Mystery...
- Gracious and loving God, embolden us by your Spirit to be the totally free person who can feel all of it and not be afraid of any of it. Amen.