



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora
October 15 2023 - Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Canon Paul Walker

In a week that we have
witnessed the unimagined

horror unfolding in Gaza and Israel, there is a mix of a reluctance to hear or watch the news accompanied by a strange addiction to hear and watch the news.

I commend to you the statement from the Archbishop of Canterbury who writes: “Our hearts are broken open by the grief of Israelis and our Jewish brothers and sisters around the world, for whom this trauma and loss stands in the dark and terrible shadow of the worst days of their history.... I beg that those who have been taken hostage are set free to safety... I plead that the sins of Hamas are not born by the citizens of Gaza..... and I urge the Israeli government to exercise their right of defence with the wisdom that might break the cycles of violence under which generations have struggled.”

The Archbishop of Jerusalem and all the leaders of Christian churches in Jerusalem have invited people of faith and goodwill around the world to make Tuesday a day of prayer and fasting. We are invited to pray for peace, pray for the hostages, pray for Israelis and Jewish people, pray for Palestinians, pray for the work of peace keepers, medical teams, and all the innocent people caught in this conflict.

The church will be open this week for you to come in to pray. Tuesday we will offer a short Litany of Peace at 11:30, Wednesday a communion service at 10:00 and Thursday an Evensong for Peace at 7:30.

Having the privilege to visit the Holy Land on three occasions over three different decades I have a clear image of this land and these people. I have a clear image of the old city of Jerusalem with the four quarters of Jews, Christians, Muslims and Armenians who all live, work, worship and go to school with a shared desire to live together in peace. I have a clear image of the Golan Heights in the north and the Dead Sea in the south. I have a clear image of the concrete walls that surround Gaza, the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Bethlehem, where Jewish, Christian and Muslim Palestinian people live. I have a clear image of the access points in the walls with airport security to get to your work or visit family and friends on the other side of the wall.

It is a beautiful and varied land from the green mountains in Galilee, the hills of Judea, and the arid rocky desert of the Dead Sea that is occupied by incredibly hospitable and generous people of deep faith from various traditions.

For Jesus, a faithful Jew, this was a land that he walked across and knew well, Jerusalem was a city that he wept over, and the temple was his house that he longed to become a place of prayer for all people.

There is a clarion call from Jesus that the way of the cross is the way of life, that many are called but few are chosen, that narrow is the gate that leads to life and wide is the road that leads to destruction.

Violence and the power of land is such a part of the Jesus' human experience and it is a recurring theme in the bible.

In our first reading, in spite of the Hebrew's short sightedness in thinking that Moses had abandoned them and wasn't coming down the mountain, Moses reminds God that his people are worth delivering again and again. After all, what would the Egyptians say if God brought them all out of slavery only to blot them out in the wilderness? Remember the covenant, Moses implores. Remember their land.

In the parable of the king's wedding banquet for his son, what seems important to him is to have his banquet hall full. It doesn't matter if the guests were invited or not, or whether they were good or bad, but with all the preparations made and everything ready, there needs to be people present. But the violence, a common experience in the Roman Empire, is present: the King's messengers are killed; the invited guests' city is burnt down; and the one guest is thrown out into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth all for not wearing the right clothes. It's not a happy time for all.

Wedding robes seems to be the ticket for entrance to the banquet. So what is this wedding robe?

It seems to me this is what Joseph wore when he forgave his brothers. He had mercy on them.

It is what the good Samaritan wore when he bandaged up the wounds of the Jew who was beaten up and left half dead on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. He is the one who showed mercy.

It is what the father wore when he welcomed his younger son back after he spent everything on dissolute living. He showed him mercy.

It is what Jesus wore with the lepers, the tax collectors, the sinners, and those who denied him and condemned him to death. He showed them mercy.

In every case the person offering mercy recognizes that recipient of the mercy, the other, is *one* of them. You belong to me.

Mercy is the robe of the crucified and resurrected one, and justice is the seat of the ascended one. It belongs to the One who has defeated the powers and principalities of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God. Mercy belongs to us as we recognize again and again that we belong to one another. May God have mercy on us and on our world, as we learn to recognize the image of God in one another.