

Visit to Palestine – 10-20 September 2011



The group (apart from Bishop Andy who took the photo!). During their time in Palestine, the group visited several projects and met with people

The incarnate waiting Reflections on Yanoun and Ecumenical Accompanists

I haven't managed to quite clear the dry dust from the hidden crevices in my suede boots. It's stuck there, ingrained as though clinging in an effort to escape the heat and deadening tension. And that's one of the things I most remember – the dry and dusty roads which 'carried' us there. 'Carry' is a generous word in fact and 'road' only slightly more so. The ridge held the village snugly, offering a clear view of the houses beneath us and further down the valley. Yanoun. I can't quite work out if the word sounds like a cry of triumph or despair. Perhaps both and that wouldn't be inappropriate. But I also remember balloons and smiling faces almost fitting with giggles at the strangers with funny hair, eyes, clothes and gestures.



A footpath where settlers throw rubble at the children as they walk to school



School children who are under threat of violence/abuse by the settlers

A school building that has seen better days and happier ones too when walking in the hills happened without jeer, stone throwing and guns pointing. The constant, persistent evil walking around like a roaring lion. Whom resist steadfast in the faith? But they cannot do it alone. The 'stalking menace' has too many cards – economy, weaponry, government and an apathetic world more likely to get worked up by Topshop and tinsel. The deserted farm beneath us stands tall but a gloating echo from the hills above sounds a chilling note - one down, ten to go. How extraordinary that smiles should be found in the surviving houses with cheeses, olives and fil-fil on offer to keep the heartbeat of coin ticking on.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And there they were. Ecumenical Accompanists drawn from across the world. Sponsored by the World Council of Churches responding to a call from churches in the Middle East. Accompanists. Those who for a season, tabernacle. A holy presence waiting and staying so the deadly pestilence that stalks in the night cannot visit its menace unanswered, unseen and unchallenged.



The Revd Linda Bailey and Bishop Andy in Yanoun on the West Bank with Ecumenical Accompanists

The God who took flesh came among us. He dwelt and his presence brought light into darkness. The holiness of an almighty God packed into human smile, frail body and determined resistance. The kingdoms of this world will roar and war but those who tabernacle and live and wait break a Kingdom into this world the like of which it cannot understand and ultimately cannot withstand. Waiting and presencing.

Is not this the Word made flesh who comes among us full of grace and truth?

+Andrew Bangor



A settlement

Can these dry bricks live? A reflection on missiles, buildings and hope

The devastation experienced in Ramallah during the second intifada existed at two levels. There was the obvious physical destruction of government buildings, homes, businesses and the loss of primary infrastructure such as roads. It's easy to quickly skirt over this kind of loss and move to its inevitable consequences upon human beings, their sense of well being, purpose and hope. But that wouldn't do justice to the economic hardships, the waste of resources and the paralysing effect on the ability of the area to function normally. The scale of devastation hints at a proportionality where the task of rebuilding reflects the devastation and invites simple reflections but of a more global nature such as whether this evil waste of human and physical resources is even or ever considered in human conflicts.



A wall separating the Palestinians from their families, work and farms



Settlers with guns

Whatever the outward destruction, there can be little doubt the greater damage is done to human hopes and aspirations. The violence is visited indiscriminately on the young and old, the resisting and passive, the religious and unbelieving. Evil is rarely discriminating in this way. And the scars are not so easily covered – skin and road might heal a great deal more quickly than soul and spirit. Wounds are never simply physical and what grows out of the brutalized lives will always carry the wounds of war within it.

Can these dry bricks live? Picture with me the broken doors rescued from the shattered buildings and crumpled concrete. Pictures of hope and loss, of future and fear propped up as a permanent reminder of what took place and how life could never be the same again. Feel the sadness in the scribbled tears, hear the groaning of bending steel and hiss of broken water pipes. But they sit in a room of redemption with broken earthwear pipes fixed as light fittings. A mottled collection of ruined artefact newly fashioned to bring life and even some normality. The shiny buildings and the buzz of life merge as you step back out into the light. New buildings brought up from the ruins, society walking and working instead of cowering and hiding. The determination of a man to rebuild, a refusal to let the bombs have the last word and that hatred and destruction should never win.

‘Go and tell the story’ he says, ‘tell the truth and do not hold back’. Hope rises even as he nervously speaks into my rickety mobile recorder. The dry bricks need not disintegrate to powder and dust, the buildings can be re-born and hopes can rise with them.

Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?” But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

A God of resurrection brings hope from despair and life from ashes. The cruelty of destruction is rolled away like a mighty stone. Those wounds (yet visible above, beneath and behind) carry a redeeming potential and show love is indeed stronger than death. Now the disciples, those who have heard the message and seen what has been done, must become the bearers of good news. The angels will not keep quiet, dry bones can live. Let those who have ears, hear.

+Andrew Bangor