# **Reflection for Nov 1, 2020 – Conquest or Collaboration?**

# **Based on Joshua 3:7-17**

**Prayer**

Some of you might remember a story I told you not long after I arrived here in Peachland of my trip to the Philippines. I was participating in a United Church Outreach project as an “Observer” to Human Rights issues. We visited a small fishing village where about 100 families live. They have been there for generations. We heard stories of ancestors scrambling into hiding during the Spanish conquest.

Their meager existence is being threatened by a beach front development. Their land illegally acquired by a wealthy foreigner.

The villagers are struggling to maintain a presence amidst a constant threat of the demolition of their homes, occupation and arrest by military police and private security guards. I slept under the stars for a few nights on a very uncomfortable bamboo bench. We toured the village, and met and discussed concerns with village leaders.

The villagers live a very simple life but I remember being struck by the vitality there. The children are healthy and happy. They have very little but are grateful people. (pic)

And so, it was heart wrenching to witness the results of oppression first hand, such as small homes like this one reduced to rubble as intimidation while locals watch helpless. (Pic 2)

This past Thursday I attending a Town Hall on-line meeting of the Pacific Mountain Region with guest speaker Rev. Keith Simmonds, a former president of BC Conference. Keith shared his experience as an International Peace Keeper on a trip to Palestine earlier this year. He and the team he joined were in Palestine as part of an entourage to uphold human rights of Palestinian Children.

Palestinian Children are always watched by Israeli soldiers to and from their way to school and they are often harassed. Skirmishes are frequent. In frustration youth throw rocks at the soldiers who retaliate with tear gas. (Pic) Can you imagine, these are children we are speaking of. Young people who just want the right to education. Keith and others in his delegation were there to witness the children’s movements, so that some safety can be assured. The Israeli authorities are less likely to use brutal tactics with onlookers’ present.

The history of the Palestine/Israel conflict is of course complex and started shortly after the second World War, when Jewish people were given land to call home. What many often forget though, is that the land they were given was already occupied. And ever since, there has been conflict as the Jewish people have wanted more and more land pushing the indigenous Palestinians out of traditional territory they have occupied for a long long time. As the Israeli Nation expands, there are more and more pressures for Palestinians to move out. They are seen as unwelcome guests rather that rightful land owners. Human rights violations are rampant. (In our Minute for Mission this morning you will be hearing something of the 250 – 280,000 Palestinian Refugees that have been forced to live in camps in Lebanon alone for over 70 years)! [[1]](#endnote-1)

When Keith showed slides of simple Palestinian homesteads reduced to rubble (Pic) my thoughts cascaded back to those good people in that village in the Philippines, all they want is to be secure and live peacefully in their birth homeland. That is a clash with the Jewish people who feel they have entitlement to the land they were not only promised after the war, but the land they were promised by God and Abraham.

In today’s reading from the book of Joshua, Joshua, and his people stand ready to cross the Jordan. This story takes place around 1200 BC. The priests carry the “Arc of the Covenant,” an acacia wood chest covered with gold. Inside it are the 12 tablets that Moses received from God on Mt. Sinai. It is the destiny of the Hebrew people that they should cross the Jordan, enter Canaan and conquer it to settle upon their new promised land. God’s promise will be fulfilled.

The priests no sooner enter the waters of the Jordan and the Jordan stops flowing. All of the nation of Israel crosses over on dry land. We can only remotely imagine their elation. Finally, God’s promise would be fulfilled! They crossed over adjacent to the city of Jericho which would fall to them in battle. The land after that and other conquests of the Canaanites would be dispersed among the 12 tribes of Israel, the twelve identified in the Joshua text that Shirley Mae read for us.

Such incredible history and we have touched only a snippet of it. Nonetheless this leaves me with a nagging question. Did God will the Tribes a “Land of Milk and Honey,” through any means, including military conquest, or is this historical account based on the belief that God was supportive of the birth of a new nation “at any cost?”

Throughout history there have been many military conquests where “God’s name” has been held high as instrumental to, if not a means for success. God has, and still is, looked upon as guiding and supporting waring nations that leave countless dead and nations brought on their knees with cities, towns and villages left in ruins.

Military aggression and combat were common in the ancient world and we read of it often in Hebrew literature. But did God really condone such things? Does God condone such actions today? That seems to be a huge contradiction that most of us recognize.

However, that attitude still prevails in many societies. Some forms of aggression are still appropriate and the ends justify the means, sometimes even in the name of God. The conflict between Israel and Palestine is one. Can there not be some cooperative way to live in peace together or do ancient understandings of birthright and entitlement need to be held up at regardless of outcomes? Can’t children get an education and go to bed at night knowing that their home will be still standing in the morning?

In Canada of course, our appalling history of our Indigenous Peoples is another example. Our governments saw Indigenous peoples holding huge tracts of land. They tricked them into giving up rights and entitlements and put children in residential schools teaching them about a God that was incomprehensible and stripping them of their language. We are still trying to sort out the damage done and make meaningful reconciliation efforts.

We absolutely support, if not insist, that the Jewish people have land, freedom and a future, but why does it have to be at the cost of others? That is not what God wants. I am convinced that God didn’t want that either during the settlement of Canaan, or any other lands. Opposed and repressed people needed to hold onto hope. In Joshua’s time that hope was God and so God is seen to have been an advocate for conquest.

Canadian settlers also wanted land, security and a future, but it didn’t have to be at the expense of our indigenous peoples.

We know better now. We know beyond doubt that our God is kind, loving and filled with grace. The Holy Presence does not condone violence, but would speak to justice through advocacy, dialogue, reconciliation, give and take, compromise.

While some would use the argument, it is old and outdated theology to believe in a God that would strike down those that would oppose our perspective, or what we believe to be our entitlements including our birth rites. That kind of thinking is just not in keeping with the Holy One who would have us treat our neighbour as our self.

That is something I believe we must not forget when we hear those arguments used as they continue to be in too many familiar places. And we must resist such rhetoric when we hear it.

One such way we can act today is in support of a continued vigilant effort to protect Palestinian children by calling upon the Government of Canada to ensure that their human rights are protected through a special envoy to Palestine. The Pacific Region is acting in this regard by sending a petition to the Federal Government, a petition that came out of Rev. Simmonds trip. I have appended this to the presentation for today and will have Chris put it out on our next PUC. Please don’t hesitate to talk to me if you have any questions. I will also attach a link to a helpful video explaining the Israel/Palestine conflict.

And as always, a thank you for listening this morning and a note of gratitude for your thoughtful consideration to speaking out for God’s children everywhere that can’t effectively speak for themselves.

Amen

1. https://www.bing.com/search?q=how+many+palestinian+refugees+in+lebanon&form=ANNTH1&refig=b956ff64bbde4353ac55502a766b3bf9&sp=5&qs=AS&pq=how+many+palestinian&sk=PRES1AS4&sc=7-20&cvid=b956ff64bbde4353ac55502a766b3bf9 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)