



Shortly, we will sing, “For the Healing of the Nations,” as we pray, “peace be yours” on countries all over the world. The way the song is composed is rather interesting as the countries are put together in pairs, and sometimes those two nations grouped alongside each other, are not exactly the best of friends, to say the least: North and South Korea, Ireland and England, the United States and Cuba; and perhaps the ones that make the news most consistently for all the wrong reasons are Israel and Palestine. It happened, yet again, earlier this year.

After a month of rising tensions in Jerusalem, more intense violence than usual broke out, leaving over 200 dead. After 11 days of fighting, a cease-fire was finally agreed upon in May, but, of course, circumstances are still far from peaceful for both Israelis and Palestinians. It was yet another chapter to a seemingly never-ending saga of hatred and hostility between the two nations that are constantly paired up with one another in the most depressing international headlines. It makes not just the people there, but all of humanity, wonder if there can ever be a compromise for them to live side-by-side in peace. After all, there was a question asked in Biblical times, whether anything good could come from Nazareth, referring to the One who was meant to bring some sense of peace and love and compassion to the whole world, in Jesus Christ. Now, it’s more than understandable to ask if any good news whatsoever can come from Israel and Palestine, the very land from where everlasting life was meant to be unleashed on the whole world.

And yet, it just so happens that shortly after the rising tensions in the region, a good news story did emerge that did not make a headline of any sort. It was about a woman named Idit Harel Segal, who turned 50 this year. However, she wanted to do something different for her milestone birthday. Instead of receiving gifts, she wanted to give one, and not just any gift, but to donate her kidney to a complete stranger. It was meant to be a living tribute to her grandfather, who died a few years ago: a Holocaust survivor, who taught his beloved granddaughter to live out the Jewish faith in such a way that there was no higher duty than to save a life.

Segal took that to heart, and not just applying it only to people who lived in her home country or shared the same faith tradition. No, the complete stranger to receive this gift of new life was a 3-year-old Palestinian boy living in the Gaza Strip, a place that is most feared by plenty of Israelis. Nevertheless, this kindergarten teacher insisted that this child’s life was worth saving. Come to think of it, the words we heard from the Psalm this morning, are also in the Jewish sacred texts:

<sup>3</sup>When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

<sup>4</sup>what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them,  
human beings that you should care for them?

<sup>5</sup>Yet you have made them little less than divine;  
with glory and honor you crown them.

Segal, a proud Israeli citizen, must have been under the impression that a Palestinian was cared for by God, too; that that young boy was crowned with glory and honor as well.

When Segal donated her kidney, she wrote a letter to the child:

*You don't know me, but soon we'll be very close because my kidney will be in your body. I hope with all my heart that this surgery will succeed, and you will live a long and healthy and meaningful life. I threw away the anger and frustration and see only one thing. I see hope for peace and love. And if there will be more like us, there won't be anything to fight over.*

Except, amidst the fighting between Israelis and Palestinians earlier this year, three relatives in Segal's family died. With that in mind, some of her family staunchly opposed Segal giving up her kidney, worried that it would risk *her* life in the process. One of those dead set against it was her own father, who stopped talking to her altogether. That was even before she said a word about a Palestinian being the recipient.

However, the night before the surgery, her father called, barely audible over the phone as he was crying, attempting to put together his words to her. Soon enough, Segal let him know that her kidney, her gift of hope for peace and love, was going to a young boy in the Gaza Strip. There was silence for a while before her father said, "Well, he needs life also." And for that briefest moment in this never-ending saga between two countries seemingly set on annihilating each other, a family on each side gave not just their respective homelands, but the world, an awe-inspiring bit of hope.

And I cannot help but think of the father's words, "Well, he needs life also," a holy moment of unexpected grace; I cannot help but think of those very words revealing the deepest feeling God has for us. That those words must have been in God's heart when Jesus emerged out of Bethlehem and Nazareth: that, in fact, good did come from there after all, because, "Well, [they] need[ed] life." Those words must have been in Jesus' heart when he went to the cross and came out of the tomb: "Well, [they] need life." Those words must be the reason why the Holy Spirit soars within us each and every day, because, "Well, [they] need [abundant] life!" Such relentless unexpected grace makes the Psalm all the more beautiful:

<sup>3</sup>When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

<sup>4</sup>what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them,  
human beings that you should care for them?

<sup>5</sup>Yet you have made them little less than divine;  
with glory and honor you crown them.

So, on this World Communion Sunday, we are mindful that the crowning with glory and honor is not limited to a certain region of the world, to a single country; but God insists on the whole world being thoroughly covered with a love in which hatred and anger and hostility stand absolutely no chance to survive. We cannot help but do our part to pray, "peace be yours" on all the nations undeniably adored by this universal God. And for those who will never make the headlines like Idit Segal, who bless us with the hope to fall in love with the Good News all over again, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen.

Source: Kellman, Laurie. "A Birthday Gift: Israeli Woman Donates Kidney to Gaza Boy." *Associated Press* (July 28, 2021).