

PARTNERPLAN

John McCulloch - Israel June 2021

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Dear Friends



*So much of the city
is our bodies. Places in us,
old light still slants through to.
Places that no longer exist but are full of feeling.,
like phantom limbs.*

*Even the city carries ruins in its heart.
Longs to be touched in places
only it remembers.*

(Anne Michaels 'Phantom Limbs')

The Erez checkpoint crossing from Israel into Gaza was all but empty, as I walked through the 1km caged passage into this landscape of broken dreams...



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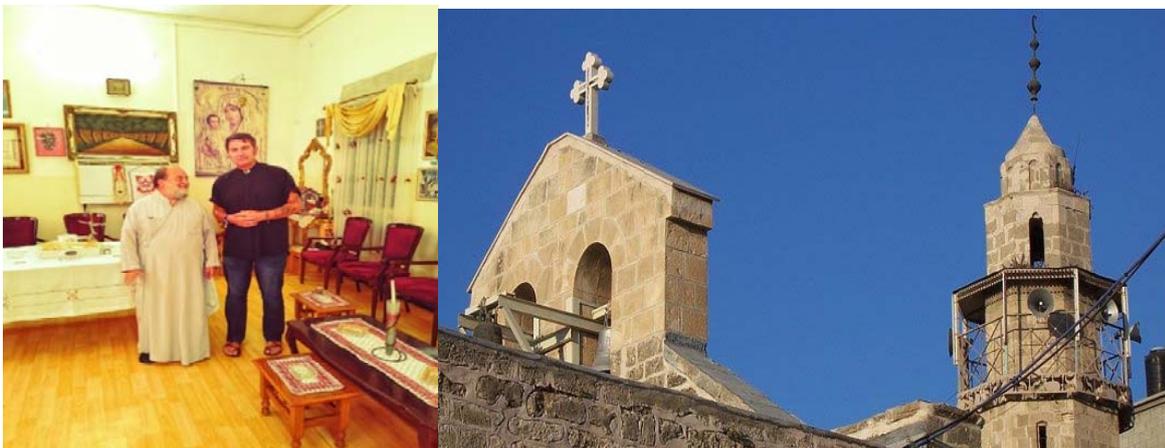
I heard stories of families lying awake at night as the bombs fell, trying to comfort their children. I saw the trauma in the eyes of some of those I spoke with, telling me of their desperation and fear of having nowhere to go, nowhere safe where they could take their children.



Another told me 'we are tired of war and violence, why can't we live in peace with our Jewish brothers and sisters? We are all children of Abraham. Imagine if we worked together for the good of all?' Another told me how they had lost all hope, and that unless there is a political solution, the cycles of violence will keep coming.

But amidst the ruins and devastation, I also saw glimmers of hope and beauty from those who refuse to give up. From those who are working to alleviate human suffering in near impossible circumstances. Those who believe that a better world is possible, and whilst we have breath in our lungs we should do all that we can to work for peace, justice and the healing of our broken world.

It is always a privilege to visit our Greek Orthodox bishop friend, and the priests and sisters at the Catholic Church, who engage in daily acts of mercy. Sheltering families as the bombs fall, feeding the hungry, embodying compassion to those who have lost everything.



And as the sun sunk into the Mediterranean, I took a walk along a very packed Gaza beach, and was overwhelmed by the kindness and welcome of all those with whom I spoke.

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On one of the mornings, I visited a psycho-social centre, which provides therapy and support for children traumatised by war.



The children showed me their pictures, and explained to me what they were drawing. Staff told me of families who had dispersed their children to friends and family during the recent conflict, so that if their home was hit, at least some of their family would survive. It was deeply tragic to see the trauma in the eyes of children, and listen to some of the stories of those who have lost everything.



These children have known little else except war, privation and fear in their short lives. Unless there is a political solution, the cycles of violence will continue. 'We are tired of war' someone told me. 'We just want to live in peace and to be free. We don't hate anyone. We must work together for peace.'

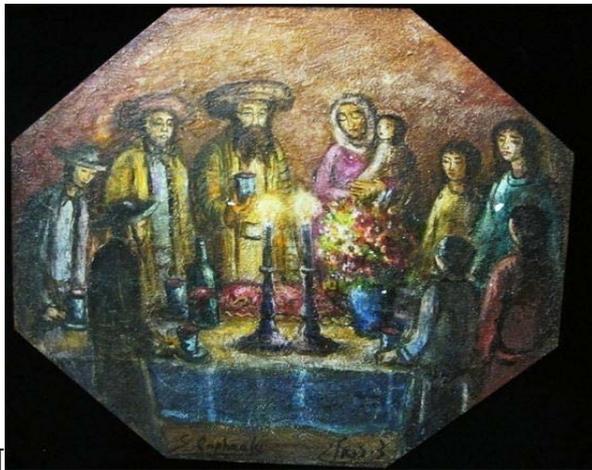
I drove down to Nuseirat Refugee Camp in central Gaza, to Khan Younis and Rafa in the south, visiting projects that empower women, clinics that help bring care to malnourished children and

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chronically impoverished communities, vocational centres that provide education and training for the youth of Gaza. If there is any hope to be found in Gaza, it is amongst those who are working to alleviate the suffering.

The day after I returned from Gaza, I was invited for Friday night Shabbat with some of my Jewish friends. I joined them for worship at their synagogue. We sang and prayed. The Rabbi asked me to share some thoughts about my trip to Gaza. And at the shabbat table, as the bread was broken and handed round, and we drank the wine, we lamented a world intoxicated by conflict and injustice, which has not learnt the ways of peace. My Jewish friends also told me of the tears they had shed, not just over Gaza but with the intercommunal violence within Israel 48. Israeli children spending nights in bomb shelters, a climate of fear permeating the whole of society, violence and internecine hatred in a deeply divided society. 'How can we bring healing to our world?' one of them asked, 'it is as if everything we have been striving to do all these years for the good of all has had no effect'.

We long for a day when our Jewish, Israeli and Palestinian brothers and sisters can learn to live together in a context where the human dignity of all is respected. After all they are brothers and sisters of the same family.



One of the very first lessons of the Torah that is given a place of high priority: All human beings are created equal. This belief in equality compels action in response to discrimination, racism and racial injustice.

-Rabbi Dr. Laura Novak Winer

When we hear and accept what we hear without meeting others, without asking how can it be, without looking for friends outside our circles, when we accept hatred for a group as a legitimate discourse - Pharaoh is alive and well, inside ourselves.

-Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

John McCulloch