

World Day of Prayer from Palestine: "Bear With One Another in Love"

Hannover International Worship

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**Dialogue Sermon by Pastor Viola Chrzanowski,
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You know what a "win – win" scenario is, don't you?

Sure. It's when two conflicting parties find a solution they both benefit from.

Exactly. Now my impression is that this is a "lose – lose" scenario.

What do you mean? This whole service?

Or this sermon we are supposed to do?

Yes, both. Whatever we do, we can only lose.

It doesn't really matter what we say, we are bound to end up on the wrong side.

Isn't there an expression, something like "We are sitting on a fence"?

When you are sitting on a fence, you are bound to fall down on one side or the other. The only question is on which one.

So, what's the solution? Carefully striving for perfect balance?

Avoiding any suspicion of taking sides?

But didn't we already take sides by even celebrating this World Day of Prayer? This did in fact cause us a few headaches:

Can we really do that this year?

Good question. It begins with the vocabulary: We tell people that World Day of Prayer comes from a different "country" every year. This year it's from Palestine.

Now is that a country?

It's recognized to be a state by 138 United Nations member states.

It's not recognized to be a state by 53 states, among them Germany.

I tried to circumvent this question by speaking of a "region".

Also, you may remember that two years ago the World Day of Prayer came from England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. That's not a country.

True, Scotland is missing. But let's get back to this year's service.

The question was: Which side can we be on without being accused of being biased or even antisemitic?

Hm. You know what I just thought of?

What?

Do you know these bracelets that used to be popular in Christian youth groups some time ago? They had the letters W W J D printed on them. That stands for "What would Jesus do?"

So?

So? I think that's the answer to our question.

On which side would Jesus stand? That's the side we should be on.

Well, on which side would Jesus stand?

There can be only one answer to this question:

Jesus would stand on the side of those who are suffering.

On the side of those who lost loved ones in the horrible October 7 attacks.

On the side of those who are fleeing from one end of Gaza to the other and don't know where to go any more.

On the side of those who are in anguish about their brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, who are still being held hostage.

On the side of those who are suffering hunger and lack of medical care

because not enough convoys with food and aid are able to make their way to the people.

On the side of those who have been hated and slandered and persecuted for centuries, and who are being denied the very right of existence to this day.

On the side of those who are yearning for peace, and those who are actively working for peace in many different projects. Israelis and Palestinians working together, people of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faith working together.

Jesus would stand on the side of the suffering. Yes, I am sure that's where he would stand.

Not "would". Did. That's where he stood.
He did stand on the side of the suffering.

So that's where our place ought to be.
It can't be all wrong to stand where Jesus stands.

Isn't that the principle of many relief organisations:
to look only at the suffering person, and to help regardless of who this person is. Regardless of color of skin, religion, country of origin, status, age.

This also means I need to open my mouth and speak up whenever stereotypes, prejudice, or racism are being voiced.

When all Palestinians are stereotyped as terrorists for instance.

Or, probably much more dangerous at the moment, antisemitism cropping up in the disguise of criticism at the state of Israel.

"Peace is the bond of unity that ties you together." What a sentence.

When the Palestinian women chose this motto for this year's World Day of Prayer a few years ago, they had no idea what a meaning this would have now.

"Peace is the bond of unity that ties you together." An amazing sentence, indeed. But you know, the German committee slightly changed the motto. It's still from the same context, from the letter to the Ephesians, but I think I like the original motto even better: "Bear With One Another in Love".

"Bear With One Another in Love".

That's a word from scripture that is read in many wedding services.

At wedding services! To people who love each other!

I like that. "Bear With One Another!" Peace doesn't just come naturally. It takes work.

Isn't that also a motto of World Day of Prayer: "Informed Prayer and Prayerful Action". Pray for peace... and put your prayer into action.

Like the old monastic motto: Ora et labora. Pray and work.

Pray for peace, and work for peace.

Maybe we can manage not to fall off the fence after all.

Standing on the side of the suffering, praying for the people, and working for peace, that makes sense to me.

That makes sense for this service. Amen to that.