

“When he [Barnabas] came and saw the grace of God, he was glad; and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to God with steadfast purpose.”

Acts 11:23

Seeking God’s Vision

I recently explored Bethlehem with a friend who lived there before the construction of the 30 foot concrete wall that snakes through the city. Back then, people generally moved freely to and from Jerusalem, just a few miles to the north. Tourists flooded the city not just at Christmas time, but year round. Farmers tended the orchards and fields that had sustained them for centuries.

Today, the separation wall and its system of permits and identification cards generally exclude Bethlehem residents from crossing to Jerusalem, and discourage visitors from entering. The wall creates a very different landscape. The main road into town is blocked by the wall, so the neighborhood which used to welcome visitors driving in from Jerusalem now resembles a ghost town. As we followed the wall around and between homes and closed-up shops we tried to imagine how it might feel to live in this neighborhood today. On my way home from my volunteer work at the Palestinian Lutheran schools one day, as I crossed the checkpoint to return to Jerusalem (a privilege of holding a US passport), I feared that I have little hope to offer our students, who have experienced so much trauma and humiliation. Who am I to tell them there is a better future ahead? I felt ashamed that I could not even visualize Bethlehem without the wall. In that moment, I asked God to show me a vision of Bethlehem freed from the wall. I had come to the realization that I couldn’t do it myself – I did not have the answer.

Later that same week, I saw the vision I had asked for. Many visions, in fact: paintings, collages, comics, and quotes painted on the wall. The graffiti is the work of both local and international artists. One mural pictures people opening the wall by pulling down a giant zipper; my favorite portrays the giant panels of the wall falling toward the viewer, with a clear view of Jerusalem on the other side, and a ladder to heaven revealing God’s love to the people. It is the work of the faithful in this conflicted land who seek God’s vision above all the cruelties imposed by human hands and dollars.

We pray together, as in the old Irish hymn, “Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; naught be all else to me save that thou art.” Please, God, reveal to us the potential you see in your creation. You are what matters – we want to witness your truth in this messed up world. Your powerful vision of peace has the last word.

Rev. Emily Goldthwaite Fries is an ordained minister of the UCC who has volunteered through Global Ministries to accompany our partners of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

(Revised from the Disciples Peace Fellowship blog, Shalom Vision <http://www.dpfweb.org/dpf-blog/>)



You make the difference...

The prayers and help you provide through your local congregations make possible the work and witness of GLOBAL MINISTRIES, which is supported by Disciples Mission Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) of the United Church of Christ.

WWW.GLOBALMINISTRIES.ORG

“When he [Barnabas] came and saw the grace of God, he was glad; and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to God with steadfast purpose.”

Acts 11:23

Seeking God’s Vision

I recently explored Bethlehem with a friend who lived there before the construction of the 30 foot concrete wall that snakes through the city. Back then, people generally moved freely to and from Jerusalem, just a few miles to the north. Tourists flooded the city not just at Christmas time, but year round. Farmers tended the orchards and fields that had sustained them for centuries.

Today, the separation wall and its system of permits and identification cards generally exclude Bethlehem residents from crossing to Jerusalem, and discourage visitors from entering. The wall creates a very different landscape. The main road into town is blocked by the wall, so the neighborhood which used to welcome visitors driving in from Jerusalem now resembles a ghost town. As we followed the wall around and between homes and closed-up shops we tried to imagine how it might feel to live in this neighborhood today. On my way home from my volunteer work at the Palestinian Lutheran schools one day, as I crossed the checkpoint to return to Jerusalem (a privilege of holding a US passport), I feared that I have little hope to offer our students, who have experienced so much trauma and humiliation. Who am I to tell them there is a better future ahead? I felt ashamed that I could not even visualize Bethlehem without the wall. In that moment, I asked God to show me a vision of Bethlehem freed from the wall. I had come to the realization that I couldn’t do it myself – I did not have the answer.

Later that same week, I saw the vision I had asked for. Many visions, in fact: paintings, collages, comics, and quotes painted on the wall. The graffiti is the work of both local and international artists. One mural pictures people opening the wall by pulling down a giant zipper; my favorite portrays the giant panels of the wall falling toward the viewer, with a clear view of Jerusalem on the other side, and a ladder to heaven revealing God’s love to the people. It is the work of the faithful in this conflicted land who seek God’s vision above all the cruelties imposed by human hands and dollars.

We pray together, as in the old Irish hymn, “Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; naught be all else to me save that thou art.” Please, God, reveal to us the potential you see in your creation. You are what matters – we want to witness your truth in this messed up world. Your powerful vision of peace has the last word.

Rev. Emily Goldthwaite Fries is an ordained minister of the UCC who has volunteered through Global Ministries to accompany our partners of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

(Revised from the Disciples Peace Fellowship blog, Shalom Vision <http://www.dpfweb.org/dpf-blog/>)



You make the difference...

The prayers and help you provide through your local congregations make possible the work and witness of GLOBAL MINISTRIES, which is supported by Disciples Mission Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) of the United Church of Christ.

WWW.GLOBALMINISTRIES.ORG