

TEARS FOR GAZA INTERFAITH MEMORIAL SERVICE

March 18, 2009

A Musical Prelude, theme from “Schindler’s List” – Leonardo Barrientos

Torchbearers: Sherrel Johnson and Jeff Warner

The Adhan – Muslim Call to Prayer

During the Adhan, all stand in reverence. The interfaith leaders walk to the sanctuary in silence, wearing the “garment of mourning.”

Recital	Arabic	Transliteration	Translation
4x	الله أكبر	Allāhu Akbar	Allah is the greatest
2x	أشهد أن لا اله إلا الله	Ash-hadu an lā ilāha illallāh	I bear witness that there is no deity except Allah
2x	أشهد أن محمدا رسول الله	Ash-hadu anna Muḥammadan rasūlullāh	I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah
2x	حي على الصلاة	Hayya 'alāṣ-ṣalāh	Make haste towards worship
2x	حي على الفلاح	Hayya 'alā 'l-falāh	Make haste towards the true success
2x	الصلاة خير من النوم	Aṣ-ṣalātu khayru min an-nawm	Prayer is better than sleep
2x	الله أكبر	Allāhu akbar	Allah is the greatest
1x	لا إله إلا الله	Lā ilāha illallāh	There is no deity except Allah

Opening Hymn – “Gaza Your People Weep”

All remain standing and sing as the Interfaith Leaders enter the church.

“Gaza Your People Weep”

*Abide with me when hope fades into smoke
With burning terror rockets kill our young
Trapped behind walls our cries go out to you
In life and death O Lord abide with me.*

*I need your presence in the midst of grief
Why does this rage descend with massive bombs?
Who can protect us from the burning gas?
Help of the helpless Lord abide with me.*

*I hear the screams of children terrorized
The screams of mothers drowning in despair
Gaza your people weep for all the dead
God of the vulnerable abide with me.*

*Hold us dear God as keepers of the faith
Faith in your justice courage to resist
God give us strength to face the tyranny
God of the innocent abide with me.*

Contemporary lyrics dedicated to the People of Gaza
by: The Rev. Wilfredo Benitez-Rivera, 2009
Music: Eventide, William Henry Monk (1823-1889)

The people remain standing

Leader: This night is a night of unrest
People: This night is a night of anguish

Leader: This night is a night of mourning
People: This night is a night of torment

Leader: This night is a night of sorrow
People: This night is a night of tears

Leader: This night is a night of solace
People: This night is a night of hope

Opening Prayer - The Rev. Wilfredo Benitez

Leader: God of our Abrahamic faiths, God of Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, and Jacob; God of Sarah, Hager, Rebekah, and Rachel, God of the Prophet Muhammad, God shining in the face of Jesus, God in the tears of Mary his mother, we invoke your presence here this evening, as we gather and mourn over the senseless, cowardly, and brutal slaughter of innocent children and families in Gaza; and we mourn the needless deaths of Israeli soldiers fighting a never-ending war.

People: *God of creation, comfort us with the power of your compassionate Love.*

Leader: God of the persecuted, you above all have heard the cry of terror from wailing mothers and defenseless fathers as their children died with no chance of escape. You above all know the anguish and pain of those who live-on, the scars on their bodies and hearts, piercing down to the core of their souls.

People: *Their woundedness is our woundedness; their pain is our pain.*

Leader: God of those who seek justice, you alone give us strength. As we seek to rebuild from ashes, in solidarity with the people of Palestine and Israel, we confess our sins of complicity.

People: *Have mercy on us for we are sinners in your sight.*

Leader: Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, Allah, Elohim, be present with us this evening, be present with the people of Palestine, and with the people of Israel, who seek a dignified peace. Be present with all those who are up against powers and principalities that stand in the way of your justice and love. We put our trust in you dear God, and pray that from the ashes of Gaza - ashes born of flesh intermingled with debris - new life will emerge, as it did in the beginning when you began creating the world.

People: *Amen.*

All sit for the readings

A Reading from the Hebrew Bible – Isaiah 2:2-4 -- Dr. Robby Gordon

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills, and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come and say: “come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Recitation by Ruwaid Doudeen

Silence – *A solemn bell is rung.*

“A Jew's Prayer for the Children of Gaza” written by Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman, Read by Jeff Warner

If there has ever been a time for prayer, this is that time. If there has ever been a place forsaken, Gaza is that place.

Lord who is the creator of all children, hear our prayer this accursed day. God whom we call Blessed, turn your face to these, the children of Gaza, that they may know your blessings, and your shelter, that they may know light and warmth, where there is now only blackness and smoke, and a cold which cuts and clenches the skin.

Almighty who makes exceptions, which we call miracles, make an exception of the children of Gaza. Shield them from us and from their own. Spare them. Heal them. Let them stand in safety. Deliver them from hunger and horror and fury and grief. Deliver them from us, and from their own.

Restore to them their stolen childhoods, their birthright, which is a taste of heaven.

Allah, whose name we call Elohim, who gives life, who knows the value and the fragility of every life, send these children your angels. Save them, the children of this place, Gaza the most beautiful, and Gaza the damned.

In this day, when the trepidation and rage and mourning that is called war, seizes our hearts and patches them in scars, we call to you, the Lord whose name is Peace:

Bless these children, and keep them from harm.

Turn Your face toward them, O Lord. Show them, as if for the first time, light and kindness, and overwhelming graciousness.

Look up at them, O Lord. Let them see your face.

And, as if for the first time, grant them peace.

Silence – *A solemn bell is rung.*

“Walls of Apartheid” (Meditation) – Dr. Frederic W. Bush

Congregational Hymn – *“We Shall Overcome”*

*We shall overcome,
We shall overcome
We shall overcome someday
Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome someday.*

*We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand someday*

*Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We'll walk hand in hand someday.*

*We shall all be free,
We shall all be free,
We shall all be free someday
Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall all be free someday*

A Reading from the New Testament (English) - The Rev. Darrel Meyers
A Reading from the New Testament (Arabic) - Lulu Emery

Reader: A Reading from Matthew and Paul's Letter to the Hebrews.

**Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.**

Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body.

Reader: Here end the readings.

“Live from Gaza” A Poem of Lamentation – Read by Vivien Sansour

Silence – *A solemn bell is rung.*

The Siege of Gaza (Meditation) – The Rev. Jerry Stinson

Congregational Chant - “O Lord Hear My Prayer” - Taize Chant

*O Lord hear my prayer
O Lord hear my prayer
When I call answer me
O Lord hear my prayer*

*O Lord hear my prayer
Come and listen to me
(Repeated slowly 5 times)*

A Reading from the Holy Qur'an (Arabic) -- Imam Haitham Bundakji

A Reading from the Holy Qur'an (English) – Zynab Bundakji

Building Hope from Ashes (Meditation) – Fawad M. S. Yacoob

Silence – *A solemn bell is rung.*

Congregational Peace Hymn

Poetry Reading – Vanessa Karam

**Interfaith Litany for the People of Gaza
followed by the “Tears of Ashes”**

The “Tears of Ashes” are a visible reminder of the death and destruction that reigned down on Gaza during the recent Israeli siege. They are a visible sign of our solidarity - in grief - with the people of Palestine and Israel, who seek a dignified and just peace for both nations. We invite all people of faith and uncertain faith to come forward and receive these ashes, which will be placed underneath the eyes with the words:

Leader: God of all mercy, we have heard the cry of your children in Gaza;

People: **Across the oceans the wind has carried their terrified screams.**

Leader: God of all wisdom, we have seen the destruction of families;

People: **Across the oceans the images could not be hidden.**

Leader: God of the innocent, the children of Gaza have nowhere to hide;

People: **Across the oceans we weep with the parents who lost their most precious possessions.**

Leader: God of eternity, soldiers are dying;

People: **Across the oceans we ask that you make them soldiers of peace.**

Leader: God of the destitute, we remember the Holocaust;

People: **Across the oceans we pray that we never forget.**

Leader: God of all hope, the ashes of Gaza cry out for justice;

People: **Across the oceans we pray for strength to stand firm in your will.**

Leader: Architect of the universe who brings life to the world, it is our prayer that the ashes we share this evening be a sign to you of our humility and solidarity with the grieving people of Palestine, and the grieving people of Israel. May these tears of ashes be joined to your tears for the children of Abraham who belong to the land of Israel and Palestine. May the blackness of these tears be a

reminder to us of the dark forces at work behind the occupation, and may these tears by your grace bring us to a place of conviction where we as your children live in your Love. May these tears of ashes be a sign to us of our common humanity, and our common grief before your compassionate presence.

People: AMEN.

Vocalist: Ameena Rizk

“Receive these tears of ashes as a sign of our solidarity in grief with the people of Gaza.”

After the “Tears of Ashes” tapers will be lighted for the closing hymn. Ushers: Stanley Yon, Rose Mary Thompson, John Harrel.

A Closing Congregational Hymn by Candle Light
“Let There be Peace on Earth”

*Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.
 Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.
 With God as our Father, Brothers all are we
 Let us walk with each other, in perfect harmony.*

*Let peace begin with me, let this be the moment now.
 With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow:
 To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally.
 Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.*

Benediction - The Rev. Albert Ogle

*A Silent Recession by Candlelight with the Solemn Sound of a Bell will conclude our prayer vigil.
 The Congregation will follow the interfaith leaders out of the church by candlelight.*

CLERGY AND PARTICIPANTS

The Rev. Wilfredo Benitez-Rivera is a priest, artist, and the Rector of St. Anselm of Canterbury Episcopal Church. He has been an active interfaith leader in Orange County for over 12 years. He has traveled to Palestine/Israel twice and is on the Board of Directors of Progressive Christians Uniting; a member of the Middle East Task Force of the Episcopal Diocese of L.A.; and on the steering committee of SABEEL Orange County. An avid photographer, he has had numerous photography exhibitions including his most recent show titled, “A Justice Colored Lens” featuring photographs from Palestine/Israel.

Imam Haitham “Danny” Bundakji is the vice-chairman of the Islamic Society. He serves as Chair of the Public Relations Department of the Islamic Society of Orange County and its Board of Directors. Haitham has been active among Muslim, Arab American, and peace

organizations for more than 30 years and has made numerous media appearances. Haitham takes a special interest in interfaith dialogue and events. He travels frequently to his homeland of Jordan and has been to Palestine 19 times and to Gaza eight times.

Dr. Frederic W. Bush holds a Ph.D. in Ancient Near Eastern languages, literature, history and culture from Brandeis University. In 1965, he came to Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena where he taught Old Testament and Semitic languages and Literatures. In 1974-75, he spent a year in Jerusalem studying the geography of Palestine/Israel. Over the next ten years, he led or directed summer programs in which he took students to Israel to study Biblical Hebrew, experience Israel and Palestine, and participate in archeological excavations.

The Rev. Darrel Meyers served for forty-five years as a Presbyterian minister in churches and on campuses in southern California. He currently chairs the Middle East Fellowship of Southern California and is a national board member of Friends of Sabeel-North America. He has visited Gaza on six occasions among his twenty-three visits to Palestine/Israel. He has three children and three granddaughters.

The Rev. Canon Albert Ogle was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland and has been working in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles since 1982. He is the Founding Director of the AIDS Service Center in Pasadena and former Rector of St. George's in Laguna Hills. After completing his M. Phil. in International Peace Studies in Ireland, Canon Ogle has been researching the role of World Heritage Sites in Reconciliation. Last year he was invited by UNESCO's technical arm to be an expert consultant on the Galilee Christian Sites application for World Heritage status.

Vivien Sansour is a native of Palestine. She grew up under Israeli military occupation in the city of Bethlehem. In 1996, she came to the United States and earned a B.A. in Political Science with a minor in Theatre Arts, and an M.A. in International Studies from East Carolina University. She is a founding member of a community-based theatre called Al Harah Theatre in Beit Jala, Palestine. Vivien is an activist and organizer; she is currently a producer and writer for ImaginAction.

The Rev. Jerry Stinson, a graduate of Occidental College and Harvard Divinity School, is the Senior Minister at the First Congregational Church of Long Beach. A life-long social activist, he lived for several years in Southern Africa during the time of apartheid and in the last two years has traveled twice to occupied Palestine. Active in several interfaith efforts, last year Rev. Stinson received the Interfaith Unity Award from the South Coast Interfaith Council and the Muslim Peace Award from the Southern California Islamic Center.