



Wednesday, May 8th, 2024

To All Pilgrims of Good Heart on the Journey,

I pray blessings over you all, over each one of you, so beloved and known by our gracious and awesome God. I pray these blessings in the name of Jesus, the Christ, who ministered in His earthly life to the least of us, and who in His resurrected and eternal life continues to ignite the fires of justice and witness in our own hearts. This ministry of a Palestinian man, always turning our hearts toward God's wider vision of peace and justice, still calls to us today. I invite you all to participate in our Pacific Mountain Region Week of Solidarity with Palestine from May 15th – 22nd. This follows closely the week of solidarity announced nationally for the United Church of Canada, and I encourage creative, non-violent action that is committed to seeing change in both the national and international arenas.

Palestine is in need of our eyes, ears, hearts, hands, minds and voices now. For 215 days, we have watched violent atrocities unfold in Gaza and The West Bank. For 215 days we, as the United Church of Canada, have spoken out against this violence: calling for a permanent ceasefire, calling for humanitarian aid, and calling for a permanent and lasting peace in Palestine and Israel. As the threats, military attacks and violence continue to close in on the 1.5 million people sheltering in Rafah, the last safe zone in Gaza, many of us have felt a mounting despair and desperation in our hearts. We must remember that we are not alone, we live in God's world; and the same is true for the Palestinian people. God is with us, God is with them, God hears the prayers that rise from our spirits, merging with the prayers of millions of people all over the world.

In remembering the fish breakfast that the Risen Christ shared with His disciples on the beach, I am comforted by the words that Jesus shared with Simon Peter in John 21:15-17.

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Jesus asks Simon Peter three times to tend to His flock out of the deep and undying love of Christ. This scripture calls to us today too. Because of our deep and undying love for Christ, and the deep and undying love that we receive from God, we are called to these three things too.

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on the ancestral and unceded territories of the hən̓q̓əmiñəŋ and Skwxwú7mesh speaking peoples
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Jesus first calls us to feed His lambs; feed and care for the young, the children, the most vulnerable that need our protection, love and care. Feeding a lamb requires both a soft touch with the milk warmed just so, and the fierce protection of a mother that would ward off the wolves. The children of Palestine are such lambs. We must use our voices and resources to call for an immediate ceasefire, to call for Canada to divest from technologies and investments that fuel the deaths of these children in multitudes, and we must demand that humanitarian aid reach these children who so desperately need it.

Jesus then calls us to tend His sheep. Tending is more than just feeding, it requires witness to the needs of the flock, providing shelter, safety, support, ensuring the flock stays together and unharmed, and caring for the sick and injured. Humanitarian aid must be delivered to the Palestinian people immediately, and this includes food, water, medicine and medical treatments, safe passage, and protection. We must tend to our siblings using our voices, our resources and our connections in the world. We must urge our government to increase pressure in the international arena to save the lives of the Palestinian people, and to allow Canada, the rest of the international community, and NGOs to be present to the needs of the children, families and communities of those in imminent danger.

The third call that Jesus issues is a repeated call to feed His sheep, emphasizing that this is a lifelong commitment, for the lifetime of the sheep from lamb to adult, but also for the lifetime of the disciples. We are called to particular attention to protect and care for children, to tend to the needs of our siblings as whole people, and that we must continue this solidarity, advocacy, accompaniment and justice work in intersectional ways over the course of our mortal lives. And we must do this out of our love for God, for Jesus, and for the love and grace that God has poured out for us.

Let us, then, take the lead in our communities to lift one another up, to encourage one another in our actions, and to work to co-create the true kin-dom of God in our midst. A world with peace and justice, a world with wide communities of solidarity and support, a world where all of God's children can live without fear and famine, surrounded by death and despair. Sunday, May 19th is the PMR Justice Solidarity Sunday for Palestine and Gaza, let us unite our hearts, minds and spirits to this effort. Wear white, read this letter to one another, read the pastoral letter Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne has written to support us, pray together, and take action. Plant a tree, write letters, create your own Gaza Ceasefire pilgrimage before May 13th, or in solidarity with the national pilgrimage on May 22nd. Don't stop talking, thinking, praying and working for Palestine, the place of Jesus' birth.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kendra Mitchell-Foster', written over a white background.

Dr. Kendra Mitchell-Foster

Regional Minister – Justice

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