

Udo W. Hombach

Eine Weihnachtsbotschaft aus Bethlehem

Am 24.12.2006 besuchte ich den Gottesdienst in der "Weihnachtskirche" in Bethlehem. Dieses Gotteshaus ist weit weniger bekannt als die "Geburtskirche". Es ist die erste protestantische Kirche in Palästina, gebaut mit preußisch-kaiserlichem Segen vom "Evangelischen Kirchenbauverein" in Berlin. Heute ist die Weihnachtskirche das religiöse und, mit den dazugehörigen Einrichtungen, auch soziale Zentrum der arabischen Lutheraner in Bethlehem.

Die Predigt hielt der Bischof der "Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land", Dr. Munib Younan. Dr. Younan war im "Syrischen Waisenhaus" in Jerusalem zur Schule gegangen. Als Erwachsener äußerte er sich dankbar für die gute Bildung, die er dort erhalten habe. In seiner Predigt "Christmas Eve Message from Bethlehem 2006", auf Englisch gehalten, sagte er u.a.:

"Is there room in our world for people to see and value each other as equal human beings deserving of basic human dignity? We Palestinians wonder, here behind our walls of concrete, standing in lines at checkpoints, watching our land being confiscated and our homes being demolished: will there ever be any room for justice for Palestinians?"

If we look around us in the world today, we see so many who are living in fear, trying to isolate themselves and protect themselves through weapons, walls and war that only bring about more resentment, hate and violence. We are literally dying for peace, the real peace that can only be built on a foundation of justice. Our world is in turmoil because the peace the world seeks is grounded in political power, self-interest and expediency rather than justice. To Palestinian Christians justice seems like a cruel dream. Though many see our situation as political, really we are deep in a spiritual struggle and we wonder: Why doesn't God hear our cries? Doesn't the Holy Land deserve justice? Why do people stand silent and not speak out for justice?

The injustice that continues to haunt our Holy Land is driving Palestinians and Israelis into a massive downward spiral of unrelenting fear, violence, hatred and extremism. When justice is lacking, extremism fills the void. It is the absence of justice that is fueling the fires of extremism in the Middle East today.

Justice is the only solution for the Middle East. Justice, and only justice. It is only justice that can stop extremism from holding peace hostage in the Middle East.

The year 2007 marks the 40th year of occupation here. It is time, after 40 years, that Palestinians and Israelis experience the justice that heals and brings true peace? It is time for the occupation to end, for Jerusalem to be shared and for courageous leaders to stand up and make this dream of many generations come to pass.

It is time for a change of heart for all of us. Our prayer is that Israeli children have a future without fear. Our prayer is that Palestinian children have a future filled with hope. It is time to teach our children that a world that has room for justice leaves no room for any kind of walls that divide us.

For Christ is our peace, and in his flesh "He has made both groups into one and has broken the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. (Ephesians 2:14)

From Bethlehem on this sacred night, I urge my Palestinian sisters and brothers to stop fighting among themselves and unite in a non-violent struggle for justice. May the babe of the manger guide our feet into this path of peace. (Luke 1:79)

People tell me that I am dreaming and that facts on the ground show a very different reality. Justice is not easy to invite in. It is dangerous, and one does not know where it might take you. It involves hard choices. But, ultimately, it is better to experience the fruits of justice than to continue to suffer the consequences of war, occupation and violence.

More and more consciences are awakening to the need for justice in the Middle East, and especially in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as the core problem of the Middle East. More and more are realizing that war, militarization and power are not answer. More and more are observing that the message of the manger can change the world from injustice to justice, from animosity to community, from distrust to trust.

It is the birth of Jesus that can motivate all of us, churches throughout the world, Palestinians and Israelis, Christians, Muslims and Jews, all who want a future for our children. The babe of the manger invites us all to unite in a new symphony that sings justice and that can bring peace and transform the Middle East into a world where all have an equal place, equal opportunity, all are welcome and all can walk freely in this Holy Land.

From Bethlehem, we call on all who for peace and justice not to despair, not to be frustrated or tired even if they swim against the tide."

Kurz gesagt: Ohne Gerechtigkeit kein Frieden!