

22.4.17

Sitting by the Sea, the Sea of Galilee!



Ancient pebbles, washed over by tranquil waters.  
What feet have walked on you, Arab, Jew, Christian, few...  
What feet have come to your shore Sea of Galilee,  
needing to receive from you rejuvenation  
and peace which only cleansing waters can offer?

As I sit at the water's edge, a Christian, a foreigner,  
at this most Holy time of the year, I feel a tear roll down my cheek.

I question 'why these tears', 'why now'?  
Could it be the significance of being at a place where Jesus spent most of his ministry?  
Could it be commemorating the day his hands and feet were nailed to the cross?  
Could it be the culture shock of mixing with people living in freedom after spending 2 ½ months in  
the West Bank with people who live constantly with the weight of oppression around their necks?  
Could it be the feeling of being an unwanted outsider when I am so used to being welcomed as one  
of the family?

Perhaps the tears are a combination of all these things, perhaps more!  
Perhaps the processing of information, images, stories, feelings, won't be magnified until I return to  
my familiar culture and surroundings back home!  
Perhaps it will take the gentle sea breeze from Australian shores to draw from me the full impact  
this encounter of an Occupied land and people has had on me!

But for now, I sit with sorrow.

I sit with sadness as I hear laughter and joy from the Israeli inhabitants reminding me that their  
Palestinian brothers and sisters behind the Wall can no longer partake in this simple but nourishing  
experience of feeling waves lap at their feet.

I sit with despondency as my head tries to comprehend what it is that causes such deep distrust and  
enmity between two peoples who have shared this land for millennia. I see so many similarities in  
these deeply spiritual, tradition-rich peoples - love of family, music, culture, land.

I sit with heartache, watching life unfold in this land.

You both know pain, deep relentless pain.

You both know the injustice of persecution.

You both know fear, a gripping fear which engulfs the Occupier as much as the Occupied.

I saw it on the face of a young Israeli recruit (a boy, just a young indoctrinated boy) as his eyes darted around and finger tapped nervously on his gun.

I saw it on the face of a Palestinian father (a high-ranking Palestinian Detective) who was desperate to know where, why and for how long his child had been taken for questioning by Israeli Security, realising he is absolutely powerless to do anything.

I saw it on the face of an Israeli woman living near Gaza and heard how vigilant and on guard she always needs to be, ever alert to the sound of missile warning sirens. How, as she walks around town with her children, she is ever mindful where the nearest underground shelter is - the bus stop, the playground!

And I saw it on the face of a Palestinian mother who disclosed how she slept during the day so she could stay dressed and alert at night, anticipating the pounding on her door by soldiers.

I sit with questions as I ponder some of the final words of Jesus on the Cross,

“forgive them father for they know not what they do”!

I wonder, how many Israeli people really know what is going on behind the Wall?

I wonder, has their government been sufficiently deceptive in keeping the truth from them?

I wonder, do they know but either don't care? Or do they believe they have a privileged right to the land?

I wonder, can anyone in this day and age of social media really hide behind the veil of ignorance?

I want to talk with these Israeli people I'm seeing on the street, in the restaurants, and ask them “do you know”? “Do you know how your brothers and sisters are suffering”?

I wish I could help break up the barriers between these people, and to share the information I've acquired living in occupied communities, and to help people understand what is going on so close by their peaceful lives. When I get back to Australia, I will work to share my learnings with the wider community”.

For now, I sit with disillusionment that something, anything can change for Palestinians.

But on this Resurrection Sunday, I am reminded that out of unbearable pain and disillusionment can rise a new day. I can only hope, pray and advocate loud and clear for this new day of liberation to dawn for my Palestinian friends and echo the words of the Psalmist:

“Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negev.  
those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with  
shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves”.

Psalm 126:4-6

Insh'allah!