

God gives life against the odds

Reverend Rob Lamerton
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- Genesis 9:8-17
- Psalm 25:1-10 page 244
- 1 Peter 3:18-22
- Mark 1:9-15

Sunday 12th March 2006 Lent Two

Yesterday's papers had the disturbing news about the problems at Ginninderra Gardens Hostel and Nursing Home. The problems seem huge but much of the news is old. In fact much has been done to fix the problems! I might add that in the other 3 or 4 Aged Care facilities operated by Anglicare in this Diocese there are none of these problems. Much prayer and a fair bit of remedial action will bring life out of this situation!

I refer also to a wonderful letter from Bernard Sabella (see attached), a Palestinian Christian who ran for parliament in the recent election. I was amazed at his hope in what we might think is a hopeless situation!

Then there is in the Anglicord magazine another wonderful story about the Ahli Arab Hospital health program in Gaza

I begin to wonder how we who have so much seem to have lost hope!

In our first reading from Genesis we heard the story of the promise that Abram would be the ancestor of a multitude of nations and that Sarai would be the mother of these multitudes.

To save confusion we omitted the story of the covenant of circumcision and the reference to Abram's son Ishmael by the slave woman Hagar which although important might confuse the message today!

Instead we understand that Abram becomes Abraham

Abraham the new name means "the divine ancestor is exalted" or as it is explained "the ancestor of a multitude"

And

Sarai becomes Sarah

And the covenant is "everlasting"
it involves land
and descendants

But both Abram and Sarai are hopeless cases for a family because of their age!

In his letter to the Romans Paul emphasizes that Abraham's response was one of FAITH as the Law of Moses did not yet exist!

In other words Abraham's relationship with God was about faith/trust and grace and he refers to God in whom he believed as the one who

"gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that not exist"

Paul points out that Abraham and Sarah were "as good as dead" Because of their advanced age but they did not waver concerning the promise of God (Although we know that they did

waver because Abraham and Sarah decided to have a child through Hagar—they were impatient!

But Abraham's faith in the end wins through—and Isaac is born!

In spite of his impatience and some glitches along the way Abraham's faith is borne out in the end.

That faith Paul says was reckoned to him “as righteousness” being right with God. being “justified”.

The same God who gave life to the nations through Abraham is the one who “raised Jesus from the dead”

Paul is very keen to show that God is the God of the unlikely — giving life where it seems hopeless and even beyond death.

The faith of Christ is like that of Abraham believing that God gives life against all the odds. So faith in Christ is like the faith of Abraham bringing benefits to Jew and Gentiles (all the nations).

When Jesus spoke of suffering to Peter and the other disciples Peter rebuked him.

But it was not just suffering it was DEATH of which Jesus spoke!

Any one who carried a cross was marked for death — it was a very well known form of capital punishment!

And so Jesus is telling his disciples that he is trusting God in the face of death, in the face of hopeless odds

But to do so will
like Abraham

be the way of life for the world!

At the moment we wonder about the situation in Iraq and the idea we are being sold is that the innocent Iraqis and foreign troops are making the sacrifice for a peaceful Iraq. I doubt it!

I believe that the sacrifice which should have been made is the sacrifice of power and influence and hunger for oil by the invading countries. My question is when are the leaders of our countries going to realize that it is at the very top that the sacrifices must be made.

“Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, will save it!”

Palestinian Elections: Victory for Democracy

Dr Bernard Sabella

Jerusalem

January 27, 2006

I ran as a Fatah candidate in the January 25th Palestinian parliamentary elections and I won the trust of my people for one of the two Christian seats from Jerusalem. My campaign was not a sophisticated one as I attempted throughout to reach people in Jerusalem; its villages, refugee camps, towns and other communal localities on a person to person basis.

I had also opportunities to address relatively large audiences, some of which topped 500 people. Throughout I learnt many lessons from my people as they aired their views on current developments and their expectations for the future.

Their concerns were mainly concerns related to daily preoccupations, special needs, services and the impact of the concrete wall and Israeli military occupation practices that separate them from each other and from their basic rights of movement, free access and normal living. They stressed the need for honest communication and periodic visits of their representatives. While each locality has its unique problems, they are all willing to work together in order to come up with a comprehensive development plan that will include all of greater Arab Jerusalem.

In the village of Beit Anan, most Western village of Jerusalem, Jad, a young Palestinian who just finished college and is unemployed, spoke of the needs of young people. He elaborated his expectations and specified his plans for the development of his village of 5000 with the hope that projects that will generate employment opportunities will be launched. The village council president spoke of the medical needs of the community that does not have a clinic or even an ambulance. When there is a case that needs urgent medical attention, the trip to Ramallah takes more than one and the half hour in part due to the Israeli separation barrier and to the poor standards of the roads out of the village.

In the town of Sawahrah Ash Sharqiyah, 'Ali, a young Fatah activist, spoke eloquently of the need to reform Fatah. He said there are many young people whose commitment to Fatah is one of principle and they are sad when some irresponsible people "hijack" the movement and its principles for self interests and narrow goals. 'Ali was referring to some practices that were part of the election campaigning and that weakened the ability of Fatah to perform more effectively. But Jad and 'Ali gave me inspiration that our young people who are committed to ideals and principles should be encouraged to become part of the political process. It is young people like Jad and 'Ali who are going to make the difference for our people and its future.

In 'Arab AI Jahalleen, a Bedouin encampment turned village on the Eastern outskirts of Jerusalem, the concerns revolved around providing feed to livestock on a regular basis and with affordable prices. There was a request by the Sheikh of Jahalleen, Abu Ahmad, that those officials at the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture should be qualified to deal with the questions related to land, agriculture and livestock. Abu Ahmad expressed concern that some staff members in the Ministry of Agriculture do not have the proper qualifications to fill their positions. As a joke, Abu Ahmad, said over a cup of specially brewed Arabic coffee that some staffers are educated in "Paris" and know nothing about Jahalleen and its agricultural and livestock needs.

During the campaign I have touched base with our people and saw the love we all have to the good earth of Palestine. I was also elated by the participation of Christian Palestinians in the process. A group of Christian organizations held an open debate for all 9 Christian candidates in the Arab Orthodox Club of Dahiat AI Barid, north of Jerusalem. Over 250 people attended

and the debate among candidates was truly heated but polite with the written questions from the audience touching on hot political, social and other issues and agendas pertaining to each of the candidates. On a more personal initiative, I held one meeting with over 100 Christian Palestinians and they were all of the opinion that participation in the election was a serious obligation.

Some ask me about the Hamas landslide. My own interpretation is that this is democracy and our Palestinian people have cast their vote. I would have loved to see my Fatah movement win a comfortable majority but this did not happen due to so many different factors. The challenge now is whether internal Palestinian reform can be accomplished without the adoption of pragmatic positions on the political front. All Palestinians without exception want an end to Israeli occupation and the sooner the better. The question of how to accomplish this has been debated again and again in various Palestinian factions and movements over the years. Now that Hamas has become the political majority movement, the debate is going to be on its agenda. I realize that difficult and hard decisions await to be taken by Hamas. A movement that is at the helm of government is necessarily different from a movement in opposition or altogether out of government. I pray that Hamas would make the correct choices which are in the interest of our people, first and foremost.

I am cautiously optimistic and I am not alarmed. We need lots of wisdom on all sides. I am confident that the quiet arid yet dedicated approach shown by Mr Mahmoud Abbas, Abu Mazen, our President throughout the elections campaign and upon the publication of the results would help greatly in the strenuous process that awaits all of us in the coming months. I realize that much work needs to be done and I am hopeful that I will be, together with my PLC colleagues, up to the challenge. Most important I promise not to disappoint the trust and confidence that Jad and 'Ali and thousands others of my Palestinian compatriots have placed in me. I also promise to work hard within our Fatah movement to re-haul it and move it forward. In the end whatever gains we make in the PLC and in the Fatah movement will be the gains of our Palestinian people.

Your gifts to the Christmas Bowl will enable support of \$139 881 for agricultural, development, education and refugee programs in Gaza, Jerusalem, Lebanon and the West Bank, in 2006.

Thank you.