

COMPANION SYNOD TEAM

Epiphany Devotion

Genna Clemen
YAGM 2018-2019,
Palestine

This song is sung often in churches in Palestine. This recording is from a service during the Christian week of unity in Jerusalem at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer.



During my year as a Young Adult in Global Mission (YAGM) in Palestine, I experienced faith in ways I never had before.

Many people shared expectations that a year in the Holy Land would strengthen my faith in some magnificent way. At the first site of a biblical miracle, probably a pile of old rock, I realized that may not be true for me. I passed the site of Jesus's birth almost daily. I walked the fields where the shepherds walked and skipped stones from the shore where Jesus fed five thousand. I felt no faith stir within me in these spaces. No, but somehow my faith is stronger now. I saw faith play out in new ways. I saw God in the lives of my companions.

Life in Palestine is not easy. Palestinians have deep faith and history rooted in the land. For thousands of years, Palestinians have raised families on this land, caring for them and passing down traditions of hospitality and faith. Today, families in Palestine live under military occupation. Walking through town, I pass by many fields or groves of olive trees, planted hundreds of years ago. The olives and oil produced from these trees became the meals so often shared with me by both friends and strangers. Hospitality, a trait passed along since the time of Jesus's birth, with the most Christ-like sincerity. Every table I was invited to was filled with love and stories, both of joy and sorrow. I learned about faith from these tables, from these stories and from these people.

The way they live, love and serve each other. Each week I sat in church and listened to the Arabic service. It wasn't typical spiritual fulfillment, but every week it forced me to pause. It forced me to sit and process, to smile at my neighbor and participate in the community. Faith flows deep in Palestine. It exists in many ways, like how people cook, raise their children and grieve. I listened to my students share their dreams to see Jerusalem, just eleven kilometers away, that they no longer have permission to visit. I saw Muslim men kneel down to pray together in checkpoints. I listened to my principal talk about the attention she puts into making her home beautiful, knowing that any day a demolition notice could come from Israel. Palestinians exist as a form of resistance and as an incredible act of faith.

This song is a reflection of exactly that. It is an Arabic hymn sung at many services. It is sung during times of reflection, the verses repeated over and over. It always seemed to come up at the right moments, the ones in which I felt heart-broken, uneasy or desperate at the situations my companions face. Singing this song alongside my community reminded me of their strength and faith in each, and every moment. And as we repeated the verses in unison, that is where I found peace.

- In what ways might you be failing to see injustice in your own community?
- How is your faith motivated into actions?

Prayer:

Lord, we look to you for guidance in seeking justice. We have seen the ways in which our world has treated our brothers and sisters in Christ unfairly. Be with them now. God, we ask you to open our hearts to the stories of our neighbors, hoping to learn more about your love through them and with them. We thank you for your grace in the times that we stumble and as we learn and seek to know your way. We pray for the healing of our world. Thank you for the blessing of our natural world and those who care for it, for bread at our tables and the communities we share it with. Amen.

