

**REFLECTION 10 DECEMBER 2023**  
**“Two wrongs don’t make a right!”**  
**By Rev Dr Fei Taule’ale’ausumai**

It’s really difficult to write a reflection for Advent as a time of Peace when you watch the news and see a mother and her three girls wearing slippers and dressing gowns trying to escape the bombing in Gaza with nowhere to go and nowhere to hide.

What happened on October 7<sup>th</sup> with Hamas attacking Israel was heinous. But Israel’s retaliation or revenge attack is indescribable. ‘Two wrongs don't make a right', you should not do harm to a person who has done harm to you, even if you think that person deserves it.

It makes me sick to the stomach to think that Netanyahu and even Joe Biden can find one iota of justification for such a heinous attack and war on an innocent people. There is absolutely no excuse on this earth that can justify what is going on in Gaza by Israel. We cannot use biblical scripture to justify any of this as Zionist purport.

According to Dr Atalia Omer, Professor of religion, conflict and peace studies at the University of Notre Dame. “There is something distinct about having a view of Christian Zionism against the backdrop of the genocidal violence, a view to identify the serious moral and spiritual challenges it poses to Christians, churches, and in fact to all people of faith.”

She continues, Zionism is a political movement that emerged in Europe, but it’s very important to note that, while Zionism is modern, Zion is really central, and

the concept of Zion and the place of Zion is also embedded in the Jewish imagination.”

She cited policy implications such as the relocation of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. “This is a compulsive move that is very much in the background of what is unfolding today,” she said. “The global war on terror is also participating in the consolidation of those dynamics.”

Omer also touched upon the complex intersections between anti-black racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and white supremacy. “This is ethnocentric, chauvinistic articulation of identity,” she said. “This is just to highlight antisemitism and Zionism have a long history of co-existing with each other.”

Perhaps the first line in Isaiah 40 verse 1 is appropriate for the people of Palestine “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.”

Today’s second Advent candle is for Peace, God help us to find it.

In our New Testament reading from the Gospel of Mark we are introduced to the one who is preparing the way. John the Baptist who went ahead to prepare the way for the one who was coming. John the Baptist and Jesus are cousins and met in the pregnant bellies of their mothers Elizabeth and Mary. He’s been shouting in the desert, living off locusts and wild honey, and clothed in camel’s hair. He says that the one who is coming he is not even fit to tie the straps of his sandals. “I” he says baptise with water, but the one who is to come baptises with the Holy Spirit.

The simplicity appears to have been a feature also of John's lifestyle. Clad in the basic attire of a prophet he lived from the good food nature provided (some people really liked locusts!). John lived what according to Matthew and Luke Jesus later preached: live simply; consider the flowers, the birds, how they feed. His lifestyle was in stark contrast to that of the wealthy and those who aspired to wealth; it was confronting of that lifestyle.

I'm sure many of can relate to or remember a time in your life when you were forewarned to prepare the way for something new and exciting to arrive in your life. But to also prepare the way for a time of goodbyes and grief when someone we love becomes sick or terminally ill. No one can really prepare the way for us to be on your own, how do we prepare the way to learn to live with just ourselves?

On a lighter note, birthdays, Advent as expectation looking towards Christmas, anniversaries. For me growing up was always a time of excitement regardless of our family's financial situation. I'm told many British people recall and maybe even some of you may recall receiving an orange in your Christmas stocking as a gift on Christmas day. In Samoa, I'm told there were never any presents on special occasions just a prayer and a blessing to give thanks for God's protection and guidance on your life past, present, and future.

For us as Christians Advent is a time when we wait expectantly for the birth of Jesus. The reality is thought that for many Advent and looking forward with expectation is not always good news. My nephew and his wife were expecting their first baby, and I was with them the night before they were to go the hospital to find out what gender their baby was. We were all excited to know.

I waited; I heard nothing. So, I rung my nephew to find out the good news. After answering the phone there was a long pause. He cried, “our baby (at 20 weeks) is being induced because her foot has pierced through the cervix and we cannot save her, Helen has to give birth.” That was not the news I was expecting to hear. It was devastating and tragic. After giving them time to themselves, they were happy for me to come up to the birthing unit to be with them. Little Faith as she was named was dressed in pink crochet outfit she fitted in the palm of your hand. We had a funeral and buried her in the children’s cemetery at Waikumete in West Auckland.

Being prepared, means being prepared for both good news and bad news. No one can control our future. Preparedness can be likened to the ten bridesmaids five of whom had extra oil for their lamps, the other five had to go the store to get some more and came back to find that the bridegroom had arrived, and the door was closed. It’s a metaphor to being prepared for any eventuality.

I drive a mild hybrid car which runs on electricity but drives on petrol. I could not bring myself to buy an electric vehicle because I want to have the option of driving up to Auckland from time to time. For me an electric car does not give me any sense of security for driving on the desert road. You cannot really prepare for any eventuality if there is no where to charge your car. You may have seen that ad on television with the guy who has an extension cord which is not quite long enough to reach his car. There is absolutely nothing he can do. That’s what I’m afraid of. Being prepared to avoid those sorts of situations means meticulous planning and an itinerary which is chosen by where charging stations are. Seems way too stressful for me.

Advent as Peace. We have had different variations and celebrations of Peace recently here at our church. Two Friday's ago Tony Pearce and I went to the flag raising of the Morning Star flag of West Papua, anyone raising a flag in West Papua will be imprisoned. Ever since the invasion of West Papua over fifty years ago, the Indonesian security forces have committed a never ending catalogue of extreme human rights violations.

Over 500,000 civilians have been killed in a genocide against the indigenous population. Thousands more have been raped, tortured, imprisoned or 'disappeared' after being detained. Basic human rights such as freedom of speech are denied and Papuans live in a constant state of fear and intimidation.

I wonder whether having Peace within us is perhaps something we can strive for. Peace is not just the absence of war but also something very personal to ourselves. To have Peace of mind is not always achievable particularly in times of turmoil and upheaval. Getting all our personal affairs in order for when that day comes when your life turns to disorder or literally upside down.

Peace is also a sense of calm a place of mindfulness where we can escape to if the opportunity allows us to. However, I am aware that for many there is no such place. Sometimes the chaos of our mind and brain makes it really difficult to concentrate and settle our minds on simple basic things. I speak as someone who is still recovering from concussion.

You know when you are at peace often by being able to compare the times when you have lived with conflict and struggle. As a result of the Royal

Commission of Inquiry a documentary has been made called “Our Country’s Shame”. It is on YouTube I encourage you to watch it. Street kids are often accused of being reckless, and unsociable. One kid talks about being taken out of school because they said he would never learn anything, he was 14 ½. He said he was dumped at the airport with no money, no food, and no place to go by the State. He needed to eat, he needed to find a place to sleep, he had to steal in order to eat. The gangs welcomed him and gave him a home. The streets he said was “Peace because the hundreds of homes I was shunted to and fro from were all violent and abusive.”

Many of us here have walked through the valley of the shadow of death. Even when grief is still raw, God journeys with us and helps us to find strength not only in ourselves but in our families and those who come to awhi us, to grieve with us to be the Peace of Christ to us in the midst of our sadness.

Mark’s presentation of the followers of Jesus summons them to the isolation of the wilderness, to the task of proclamation, and also to the risk of betrayal. The wilderness is often a time of wandering, searching, discerning. Where to from here? When we emerge from our wilderness time I wonder how people, our friends our family will respond to the new you that emerges from your wilderness time. Go in Peace. Amen.