

The second trip I took to the Holy Land was not for tourism but was to learn about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We met with representatives of both nations and visited places of interest both in Israel and the West Bank. We ended a tour of a hospital in Haifa by taking an elevator down to what at first appeared to be an underground parking garage. In fact, it was an entire duplicate facility, able to accommodate all of the patient rooms and operating theaters, plus housing, food service, and day care for the staff and their families. If the building or the city were bombed, the whole operation could be transferred underground to carry on in safety. Our group debriefed that and other experiences of our visit, reflecting that we couldn't imagine how a whole country could live like that, knowing that it's not a matter of *if* but *when* the next tragedy would strike. People have often asked me if I felt unsafe traveling in that part of the world; honestly, I've felt in no more danger there than at home.

This is yet another Sunday when it's difficult for me to find a word of hope. This week it was an elementary school. Last week it was a grocery store. The only reason it probably won't be another school next week is because school will be out for the summer. We're not shocked anymore, and we're not doing anything to stop it. I imagine that people in other nations look at us and wonder how *we* can live like this, knowing that it's not a matter of *if* but *when*. The only logic I can find to explain it is that it somehow hasn't hit us—all of us—close enough to home. We watch the news, and we may weep, but we breathe a sigh of relief that it's someone else's kids. Yet in the kingdom to which we are called, there is no such thing as other people's kids.

I don't know what I'm supposed to pray for, when time and again nothing seems tragic enough to inspire change. But if there is any comfort in the Word this week, it's that even if we don't know how to pray for ourselves, we at least overhear Jesus praying for us. Today's reading from John's gospel narrates the last thing Jesus does before he is arrested, which is pray to the Father on behalf of these (that is, the disciples) and also on behalf of those who will believe through the disciples' word (that is, us). Jesus' prayer is that we may all be one, and that the world may believe that God sent him. Those two things are so important to Jesus that the last thing he does before his Passion is ask the Father for them, for us.

Jesus had plenty of reasons to be concerned about his followers, then and now, being one. Unity, as it turns out, is not our strong suit. The disciples habitually argued amongst themselves about who was the greatest. One of them had just left to betray Jesus; one was about to deny him; the others were about to abandon him; we can imagine how they would have criticized, argued, and blamed each other for those failures. And had there been any hope that the next generation of believers would pull themselves together, we need only read the rest of the New Testament, which is almost all letters to the various Christian communities chastising them for

all the ways in which they failed to live harmoniously together. Although we enjoy some communion between international church bodies, there are still 45,000 Christian denominations in the world. The next time you're frustrated by what seems to be an unanswered prayer, remember that 2,000 years ago, Jesus himself prayed that we would all be one, and what he got was 45,000 branches of Christianity.

Jesus' other prayer is this: *As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.* At first this sounds like Jesus' objective is for everyone, everywhere, to sign onto John 3:16, confessing that God so loved the world that he sent his only son...But that word *believe* that keeps cropping up in John's gospel is not about mentally checking a box; it's not, as we too often hear these days, about *thoughts and prayers*; he's always talking about action: following, living, abiding in him. Jesus doesn't ask for us to convert non-believers; Jesus asks the Father for *us* to believe that he was sent from God—for us to recognize that the nature of God was revealed through Jesus' life, and to follow that example accordingly. And what did Jesus do? Jesus healed people who were sick; he fed people who were hungry; he reached across religious, ethnic, political, and gender boundaries to restore outcasts to their communities; he responded to hate and violence with love and forgiveness. If God sent Jesus, and Jesus faithfully lived out God's will and way, then God is generous, merciful, nonviolent, just, inclusive, and non-coercive. If we are going to worship God and follow Christ, the only way we can do that is by being generous, merciful, nonviolent, just, inclusive, and non-coercive. Jesus prays first for us to be one because we won't imitate Jesus' selfless love until we understand, as God does, that for all the ways in which we divide up the human community, we really are all one. There is no such thing as other people's kids.

*How in the world can we live like this?* is the wrong question. We're not supposed to be living in a world like this. We're supposed to be living in the kingdom—that is, the kin-dom of God: the human community where we treat every other person, near and far, like we can see the image of God in them; the community where we feel each tragic loss as if it rips away a piece our very selves, because it does; the community where we love others as we love ourselves because we are, as Jesus prayed, all one. God knows we're not there, and honestly, if we don't demand change, if we don't work for change, if we don't make sacrifices for change, then we can't even pretend that we're trying to get there. May God so break our hearts so that we leave behind whatever it is that we love more than we love other people; and may God have mercy on us that our hearts are not so broken yet.