

GO AND TELL

When Jesus was crucified, many of his followers abandoned him. Most of those who remained were women who watched from a distance as he died and was buried. Roman guards were stationed outside the tomb to prevent any attempt to steal the body. We can imagine the fear and devastation Jesus' followers must have felt, particularly the women who remained faithfully watchful and attentive.

Three days later, after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary returned to the tomb (Matthew 28), and an angel appeared to them telling them that Jesus had risen from the dead. As the women hurried away filled with fear and joy, they encountered Jesus and their joy was made complete. He instructed them to go to his other disciples so that they could share in this good news.

Meanwhile, the guards went

into the city to report what had happened, and that the body was missing. The religious and military powers devised a plan to say that Jesus' disciples stole his body away in the night. Matthew tells us that "this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day" (Matthew 28:15). Many people took this message to heart, accepted it, and assumed Jesus' life was over, and his body stolen.

It is interesting to see that Jesus sends women to report this to the disciples. In that society and time, women were not considered reliable witnesses, yet Jesus chose to appear to them first, and to give him his first instructions after the resurrection. At the same time, the religious-military powers tried to counter the resurrection, using their platform and influence to propagate an alternative message.

Today, as believers, we

accept the resurrection as a true event. But would we accept it if we were faced with this dilemma 2000 years ago? Would we accept the word of a marginalized part of society, women, and believe their message that Jesus is alive? Or would we accept the message of the powers-that-be, the religious and military establishment, those who said Jesus was dead, and his body was stolen? What would we do if faced with such conflicting information?

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GO AND TELL (continued)

In our time we continue to be faced with conflicting information, hopelessness, and a message of doubt from our political establishment that wants to maintain its exclusive privileges. This narrative of hopelessness is not the only narrative however. We know there is hope, that Jesus is still changing lives, and that he seeks for us to be in fellowship with one another.

I am encouraged by our growing women's ministry, and the women in Musalaha who faithfully meet with and pray for each other in spite of the

negative messages coming from our societies, and the disparaging attacks and intimidation from some in our own communities. Like the women who met Jesus and ran to bring his message to others, these women return to their own communities with the message of reconciliation.

How can we respond today, in light of the conflicting messages of hope and hopelessness? We can continue to meet together, to talk of God's goodness to us, and to be a testimony of the unity

we have because of Jesus' death and resurrection. When Jesus appeared to the women after his resurrection, they sat at his feet and worshipped him. But the story does not end here because Jesus told them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell..." As we remember what Jesus has done for us, let us not stop by only sitting at his feet. Let us fearlessly bring his message to those around us, for it is a message of power, a message of hope.

By Salim J. Munayer



Everybody here has a story to tell and alongside that, an opinion to go with it. This is because in one way or another, everybody's lives in Israel and Palestine are affected by the conflict. Political decisions affect where you live, what colour number plate you have on your car and where you can and can't travel.

This is a far cry from my life in Britain, where I live a life (supposedly) free from state control and where questions of religion and politics are avoided at all costs, our thoughts hidden behind the mask of politeness. But as I reflect on my life back in London and life here, I can see that the apparent freedom of life in the UK breeds a certain apathy and an inability to value what I have. I think that if my faith was more directly challenged or my freedom of movement restricted, they would become infinitely more valuable to me.

I've realised this when interviewing both Israelis and

Palestinians who take part in the various Musalaha groups and events (to be published soon). What has struck me in all cases is that it is precisely because of the struggles they endure on both sides that they value life in a far richer way than I can imagine.

Each person has spoken to me about the importance of meeting together, both Palestinians and Israelis, despite the emotional and physical costs. From being called a traitor by their family, or being ostracised from their community, they all have put these difficulties aside to learn what it means to see each other as fellow mothers, sons and daughters. I see how essential it is for this to happen. If you don't put a face to your enemy, it becomes a lot easier to dehumanise them and go to war against them.

It has been hugely encouraging and rather sobering to see that in spite of struggle and lack of freedoms, people meeting together through the help of Musalaha are gaining something extremely valuable. They are learning what it means to love when it's difficult to even like. And in this, I see what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted... Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God."

By Susie, a freelance film maker from London, living in Jerusalem for three months.

EMOTIONAL OBSTACLES TO NARRATIVE

The purpose of the past women's conference was to learn how to deal with a number of the emotional, ideological and spiritual challenges we face in our relationships with the other side. As a result, we were invited to give a lecture on emotional obstacles to narrative.

In our experience, one of the biggest struggles participants face is learning how to deal with their differences of opinion.

This manifests itself most strongly when we discuss historical narratives, what happened, and how we remember the past. Israelis and Palestinians can look at the same historical event from two completely different perspectives, and hearing the magnitude of these differences can come as a shock to participants. We spoke with all the women at the conference, which included those who studied historical narrative at other Musalaha meetings, and many who have not yet studied this topic. We presented the ladies with the function of narrative, encouraged them to identify our strong (and different) emotions, and then we provided them with a number of tools to deal with our differences constructively.

We first discussed a little background theory on the subject, and then delved into an interactive activity. We showed the ladies various images from our history and the conflict, and we asked them to share with us the first words that came to mind. For example, when we showed the ladies pictures dealing with Israeli independence as reported in newspapers and Ben Gurion's declaration of Israel's statehood, we received the following feedback:

The Messianic Jewish participants men-

tioned strong, positive emotions such as pride, hope, grateful, excited and miracle. The Palestinian participants, on the other hand, raised strong negative emotions such as sadness, loss, catastrophe (Nakba), war, and pessimistic.

Then we showed pictures of Yasser Arafat, first addressing the United Nations as an illustration of public acknowledgement of Palestinian peoplehood and nationhood, and another picture of him from later in his career. Palestinian Christian participants responded with positive emotions such as justice, hope, safety and peace. Messianic Jews raised opposite emotions, such as distrust, deception, suspicion and evil.

Justice
Distrust
Hope
Safety
Suspicious
Peace
Deception
Evil



These are typical examples of how our narrative shapes our perception of history, and our enemies' history. The establishment of the state of Israel is one of the glorious events to Jews after 2000 years of suffering and persecution. However, to the Palestinians, this date marks the beginning of their suffering and persecution.

Political leaders, like Arafat, are viewed through the narrative as well. Therefore, to Israelis he is an evil man, whereas to Palestinians, he is a symbol of hope. This activity showed some of the most prominent events

in our history for Israelis and Palestinians, demonstrated how we feel about these historical events, and showed how we can look at the same images in very different ways. This exercise raised many



Miracle
Pride
Sadness
Loss
Pride
Excited
Fear of God
Grateful
Nakba
Catastrophe
Hope
War
Pessimistic
Curiosity

conflicting emotions, and it allowed us to then discuss how to deal with these great differences between us.

We discussed the need to actively practice good listening skills in order to be open and honest in our relationships with each other. We offered five practical listening tools we can apply in our personal lives and in our intergroup meetings, and we provided them with examples from our own experiences regarding how this might look. We also shared how we can take responsibility for our feelings through practicing honesty with ourselves, and responding to each other in mutually respectful ways. Finally, we shared a few pointers on how to look at our past and present.

We all deal with opposing narratives in our daily lives, perhaps in how two opposing political parties interpret the same event, or how two of our children argue about something that has happened, and certainly in Israeli and Palestinian media and school systems. We gave the ladies a practical illustration of what opposing narratives can look like, and how we can all practice handling this more effectively. Afterwards, the ladies told us that learning about the listening skills in particular provided them with tools they could use in their personal lives and meetings with each other, and they found this to be some of the most valuable information they learned during our weekend together.

LEARNING about



ISLAM

By Jack Munayer

There is no doubt that radical Islam is at the forefront of our media, conversations and even thoughts. Yet, it seems like very few of us are actually knowledgeable on the subject and even fewer of us know what Muslims themselves think of the issue. With this in mind, we felt that the subject of Islam is a burning topic that needs to be addressed. We decided to focus our second lecture on Islam and its Contemporary Changes. This lecture was met with great enthusiasm and many participants committed to attend.

Our speaker is a Muslim scholar who works on interreligious dialogue, promotes humanitarianism and rejects extremism. He started off by giving a basic outline to how Muslims understand and practice their faith, and explained the key values of Islam. He then explained some of the conflicts, divisions, bloodshed and structural changes that have happened over the interpretation of the texts. One participant was shocked with how similar these conflicts of interpretation are compared to Christianity and Judaism, stating, "They have some of the same issues we do!" Another participant expressed surprise to learn that there are so many different schools of Islamic thought and interpretation saying, "The media always presents the Muslims in one block; I only understand now how misleading this has been."

Our discussion led us through a number of subjects, including the rise of political Islam, violence and the issue of women and marriage relations. Many of the participants were eager to engage on this topic in order to have a better understanding of Islamic practise when it comes to the topic of gender.

The last subject addressed was radical Islam, at which point our speaker clearly denounced that groups like ISIS represent anything near "true Islam." He surprised many of us by saying, "What has happened over the past two years has shocked the Muslim world; we have been forced to reassess how we understand our faith and reject the evil that is done...more and more I am seeing a process of reformation; what we need is a Martin Luther to lead this change."

One of the participants said that he was excited that he could discuss such a topic in a safe environment and was truly encouraged by the speaker's words. Another participant commented, "It is so refreshing to hear a different message than the one of hate and violence that we see in the media. I see an opportunity to work together to help our communities."

There was an overwhelming feeling of mutual respect throughout the meeting, one that gave a strong sense of hope to not only reconcile those who believe in Jesus, but to reach out to people who are from different faiths. The biggest benefit that I did not predict from this meeting was the feeling of optimism we had as we finished, a feeling that I hope will guide us throughout the rest of our sessions together.

On Friday, February 6 several of our young mothers came for the first meeting of 2015. We have a mixed group of ladies with different interests. Some ask for more spiritual content in our meetings, particularly more time for prayer and devotions. Others want to focus more on issues related to our conflict, our daily reality and how it differs in Israel and the West Bank. This meeting we decided to focus more on issues related to our different experiences.

We invited Hedva, the head of Musalaha's Women's Department, to facilitate a discussion for us. After having a time for some ice breakers and worship, we began our discussion. She paired us in groups of two, which worked out perfectly this time since we had an even number of participants from both sides. She asked us questions like "Who are the minorities in your society, and how are they treated?," "What responsibilities do citizens have in your community?," "How do you register a new baby?," "What is involved in purchasing/keeping land or buying a house?," "As a woman, is it safe to go out at night or by yourself?," "How do you meet someone in your culture? What is the courtship process?," "How do you get/use water?," and "If you wanted to go to the beach right now, how would you get there?"

She gave us two minutes to interview our partner and hear their response to the question. Afterwards, we would switch. This way, we each learned a little bit about life and community issues. The discussions flowed quickly and easily, and for most of the questions, we had far more than two-minutes' worth of information to share with each other. Some of the women made the following comments (in the middle column).

Toward the end of the discussion, Hedva brought us back into a large group and asked us to share something that we learned over the course of our discussion. We learned quite a few things about each other's cultures and lives. Palestinians were surprised to learn that

YOUNG MOTHERS' REPORT

(Israeli)

I had no idea the difficulty when a Palestinian from the West Bank marries an Israeli Arab, and has to keep a home in Israel to keep their identity cards, but not being able to bring the West Bank partner to live in Israel...



(Palestinian)

I know the choice to send your children to the army is a difficult one for Christians, but it's helpful to find a Christian at the checkpoint because they will be more merciful to us.

(Israeli)

So no matter how many people live in a household, you don't get any more water than someone who lives alone?



(Palestinian)

I am surprised to know that there is a problem marrying legally in Israel because only Orthodox Rabbis can do the ceremonies for Jews.

Israelis must take their babies to the ministry of interior to register for them, and that there are villages in Israel where you must be accepted in order to live in the community. Israelis were surprised to learn of the complications Israeli-Palestinians face if they marry a Palestinian, and of the water shortages in the Bethlehem area where many families only receive water every two weeks.

After the meeting, many of the ladies shared they were happy to have the opportunity to learn about one another in the facilitated discussion. One Israeli lady commented that the exercise "opened people up to breaching subjects they wouldn't otherwise have talked about." A Palestinian lady commented that this exercise helped her overcome her hesitance in sharing about some of these issues. Several of the Israeli ladies eagerly requested that we continue with this sort of activity in our next meeting, and they want to keep learning more, stressing that "it is important to hear the different opinions, to try and understand, and to explain things...I think that if we try to share and listen with the purpose of understanding the other side, we could talk about any issue." A Palestinian lady commented, "I learned many new things about Israeli life." One Israeli gave feedback afterwards saying that this was one of her favorite meetings, "I feel like I was finally getting to know and understand these women some. I love that we asked each other specific questions. I would like to do this again."

Reflecting on the meeting, Hedva noted that "understanding each other's daily stresses and pressures helps us to be more human in each other's eyes." The encounter was sincere and fruitful, and reinforced that in spite of our physical proximity, our daily lives are very different, and we have much to learn about one another.

Munayer Family Update

Christmas was a lot of fun, with a full house, many parties and Daniel's Latino music which Sam has now downloaded to his playlist. The down side was that it passed too quickly and I got pneumonia, which took some time to shake off. In February, I made my annual winter visit to Bolton. As John is studying in London I zapped in a few days there arriving the day he turned 21. It was a wonderful visit that incorporated many different things. Back to Jerusalem, Sam has exams, Salim's allergies have caused him to cough day and night, and Jack is borrowing the car more often and growing a beard.

Jack is leading a Youth Desert Encounter in April and a Young Adults trip to Ireland in August. He is working for Musalaha but needs direction for the next step in his life whether it is work or further studies. He needs prayer for his beard to stop itching.

Daniel is writing his final paper and will be graduating in May. Salim and I will see him receive his diploma. He needs prayer for what will be his next step, if it should be work or an internship and where. What is in the future?

John LOVES London, University, swimming, his football team, and life. He just celebrated his 21st birthday and is coping well. He is challenged by the amount and standard of work at University required in English.

Sam has a lot of exams and important ones. The last two years of high school he has a number of matriculation exams. He says to himself that having three successful brothers is a hard act to follow. He is swimming and preparing for 'Nationals.' He cut his hair after 1 1/2 years (say no more).

Location Review: Jack - Jerusalem, Daniel - American University, Washington DC (Studying Inter-

national Relations), John - Kings College, London (Studying Politics, Religion, and Society), Sam - Jerusalem.

Salim turns 60 in July and for some reason I have remained 25! Due to our awareness of his ageing we are both regularly engaged in keeping fit whether walking (alone and together), gym (him) and Pilates (me). My Arthritis is causing me to slow down somewhat, but really I am only doing the above to encourage him (!?!?!?).

The summer looks scattered; at this point nobody in the family can say where they will be and what they will be doing exactly, so we don't have any plans. I hope Salim and I can relax and have some fun in the USA at Daniel's graduation (payback time for parents), we are planning a few days on our own afterwards in Boston and New York as I have never been to either place.

There are a lot of stresses and strains living and working here...

For now that's it.
Kay Munayer (for them all)

P.S. Thanks for all the Christmas cards.

Musalaha

The Netherlands

Near East Ministry
P.O. Box 30,
NL-3780 BA
Voorthuizen
NL

United Kingdom

The Andrew Christian Trust
Rockwood, Storth Road
Sandside, Milnthorpe
Cumbria LA7 7PH
UK - Charity: 327845

United States

Reconciliation Ministries
P.O. BOX 238
Medina, WA 98039
USA
Tax ID: 91-1960797

United States

For Presbyterian Churches
The Outreach Foundation
381 Riverside Dr., Suite 110
Franklin, TN 37064
USA

Canada

HOPE Outreach of Canada, *note: Musalaha.*
P.O. Box 20033
Woodstock, ON
N4S 8X8
519-537-3511

Australia

MECO Australia, *note: Musalaha.*
P.O. Box 136
Kerrimuir
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