

A Journey that Spoke Out. From Embrace the Middle East.

A reading from Luke 14 v 1-14 and 11 v 37-54

Think about the last time you saw something unfair and your response to it... were you able to say anything or do anything? Jesus often confronted wrongdoing as well as spending time constructively with those who he didn't agree with. As followers of Jesus we are called to speak out against injustice.

Jesus Heals the Man with Dropsy

14 On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. ² Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?" ⁴ But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. ⁵ Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?" ⁶ And they could not reply to this.

Humility and Hospitality

⁷ When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. ⁸ "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; ⁹ and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹ For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

¹² He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Jesus Denounces Pharisees and Lawyers

³⁷ While he was speaking, a Pharisee invited him to dine with him; so he went in and took his place at the table. ³⁸ The Pharisee was amazed to see that he did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹ Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you.

⁴² "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others. ⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees! For you love to have the seat of honour in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces. ⁴⁴ Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without realizing it."

⁴⁵ One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us too." ⁴⁶ And he said, "Woe also to you lawyers! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them. ⁴⁷ Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your ancestors killed. ⁴⁸ So you are witnesses and approve of the deeds of your ancestors; for they killed them, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' ⁵⁰ so that this generation may be charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be charged against this generation. ⁵² Woe to you lawyers! For you

have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.”

⁵³ When he went outside, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile toward him and to cross-examine him about many things, ⁵⁴ lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

An example from Embrace the Middle East.

Connie Musallam is Embrace advocacy and campaigns advisor. Basked in the U.K., her role is to help Embrace supporters stand up for the marginalised and oppressed in the Middle East. Having lived and worked in the region Connie has a rich insight into how difficult people's lives can be but also of how hopeful they are that change can happen.

‘I grew up in Jerusalem and experienced life in both the Palestine and Israel through the Gulf war and two civil wars. I fled as a refugee and returned home as a refugee. I read economics and politics at university in the hope that I would build a career in banking. But once I had graduated I knew deep down that that wasn't where I was meant to work. It took me a few years working with the European commission, the U.N. and human rights organisations to figure out where I felt my place was.

While I was in Jerusalem I worked for a small but significant human rights charity called the society of St Yves, which is also an Embrace partner. As St Yves my job was to find funds for a number of campaigns, focussing specifically on disability rights of Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, helping people to access the rights and benefits that are due from the Israeli authorities. ST Yves also gave free legal aid to Palestinian farmers and people in the Southern West bank whose homes and farms were unfairly scheduled for demolition by the Israeli courts. Embrace is uniquely placed to help people speak out for themselves and on behalf of others because of the long standing historic relationships we have with partners and churches in the Middle East and the partners we have in and with churches and supporters in the UK. We can all follow Jesus' example and speak out against injustice- it is simple. You see something that is not right and you speak out. I believe in my duty to reach out where I both see and feel that something is unfair. I believe in speaking out and in reaching out to help, in playing an integral part in society and in engaging with peace and reconciliation.

For me, that is a natural part of my calling as a Christian from the Holy Land who lives among the stones where Jesus walked. Being true to oneself and following the teachings of Jesus Christ should bring comfort and empowerment in each of our own paths.’

Heavenly Father, when we see devastating images of war and hear the inconsolable cries of those who have lost homes, livelihoods and loved ones our hearts break. In the face of so much suffering and despair come Lord Jesus and help me to see with your eyes and to hear with your ears, think with your mind and speak with your lips, walk with your feet and love with your heart so that I can reach out and be a future maker to my brothers and sisters in Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Israel, Iraq and Syria. Raise up leaders who will turn from violence and seek your ways of peace, justice and mercy. We pray this in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.

(Written by Pippa Durn)