

Week 2: Uprooted



Rev. Ashraf Tannous, ELCJHL

Bible Verse: Luke 21: 25-33

"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26 People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." 29 He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. 30 When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. 31 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

**In the Arabic translation, the word for "redemption" is al-Najjah, whose meaning is closer to "salvation" or "deliverance."*



Devotion

My grandparents were from coastal towns in historic Palestine, called Jaffa and Lydda, where you could feel a salty breeze on your face in the summer and pick oranges in the winter. For generations, orange farmers in Jaffa bred their fruit to develop thick peels so that the oranges could survive the journeys to the faraway countries that imported them.

In spring 1948, the breeze was interrupted by the sound of gunshots — and then shouting and screaming. My grandparents knew what this meant. The Zionist forces had come to their neighborhood. They didn't wait for the gunshots to come closer — they had heard how Zionists entered houses, shot to kill and then left.

My grandparents gathered their eight children — the youngest, barely 2, was my dad — and fled. They escaped. They walked. They ran. They kept walking. It was hot, and there was nothing to eat, nothing to drink. There was no certainty in approaching towns or villages. What if the soldiers were attacking there too? My dad knew only thirst. My grandparents had no choice but to do the unimaginable and quench my father's thirst with my uncle's urine.

They finally reached Amman, Jordan, about 142 kilometers (88 miles) from their home. Many families from all over Palestine were coming into the city with only the clothes on their back, some important papers, and keys to their family homes. My grandfather would invite them to our tiny, rented apartment to drink coffee and eat together. My grandmother would tell him, "Elias, save your money. You don't know what will happen." He would respond, "Hanna, don't worry. Tomorrow we are going back home."

My grandfather would sit on the balcony every night, waiting for news that the family could come home. As I write, the son of my grandfather's 2-year-old baby, whom he carried in his arms for 88 miles, still dreams of this home.

In Luke 21, we read about the signs that Jesus is coming; confusion, turmoil and waves of trouble. Life in Palestine today is like the roaring and tossing of the sea. I see people fainting from terror — sometimes literally, more than apprehensive of what is happening in the world and in our country. I often feel as if these waves are ridden by corrupt forces while the rest of us are hit by them, with no control over their pushing and pulling.

My grandfather's response to waves of trouble and turmoil was to create community and show love to his neighbors. I believe that his rootedness in his faith inspired this reaction. This is a nearness to Jesus that never leaves us; his words never pass away even when earthly things do. Seventy-seven years after my grandfather sat on his porch, creating community in chaos, I face turmoil and trouble he could never imagine. I know my people are suffering oppression, apartheid and genocide. I know I am suffering. I am not treated as human. Miraculously, the savior of the world, the son of God, knew this feeling too. As Jesus spoke about the fig tree showing signs of summer before we can see it ourselves, I see signs of Jesus in my congregation, in my sons, in my community. I have faith that they are signs of deliverance, of salvation to come.

The fig tree knows how to save energy and nourishment in the winter and to bloom at the time when it can be fruitful. Now is the time — it's a kairos moment for the church to bear the fruits of justice, peace, reconciliation and bridge-building. We, the church, are called to bear fruit, seeing the oppressed and the persecuted as fellow children of God. To separate the church from God and from the faithful is to uproot it from the soil and environment in which it belongs.

Palestinians are an uprooted people, cut off from soil that is rich in dignity, humanity and opportunity. Our faith remains rooted in our anticipation of deliverance, and in the promise of an eternal home where our roots lie: in Jesus Christ.



Prayer from an ELCJHL Young Adult

Heavenly father,

In this season of Advent, we lift our hearts to you with hope.

You sent your beloved son, the light of the world, the bread of life, to guide us through darkness, through the hard times we live in, and fill us with hope and peace.

Teach us to wait with patience, enrich us with love and forgiveness towards each other, let your peace fulfill us, enter our home and in our hearts.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior,

Amen.

-George



Discussion Questions

- 1. What's one emotion you felt when listening to this devotion?**
- 2. What did you learn about displacement from this testimony?**
- 3. What sticks out to you about Pastor Ashraf's Grandfather and the way he responded in a time of uncertainty?**
- 4. What are signs of "roaring and tossing" you notice in your community?**
- 5. What are signs you see that Jesus is coming in your community?**
- 6. The text from Luke and Rev. Ashraf's devotion both hold themes of waiting and of knowing the time to act. Where must we wait in our life today? Where must we act?**