

## Breaking Down the Wall: Lenten Reflections

*The Risen Christ says, "In the depth of this reality I will speak.  
I will be present and I will transform."* Rowan Williams



The following collection of prayers, images, and readings with questions are designed to be used during the Lenten Season with groups for daily meditation or for individual reflection. They can be used with the mini olive wood Wall or by itself as part of Breaking Down the Wall project. They also can be used during Holy Week as the themes correspond to sacred events or places during holy week.

The focus is on the word "breaking" and the places in our sacred story that intersect with the physical Wall or the walls of prejudice, fear, and racism. The themes are the following:

- Breaking Expectations (Palm Sunday)
- Breaking Bread (Maudy Thursday)
- Breaking Bodies (Good Friday)
- Breaking Down (Holy Saturday)
- Breaking Open (Easter)

Many thanks to friends: Rev. Diane Dulin for her beautiful prayers that accompany each Reflection, and for Rev. Nancy Amacher's reflection on Bethany today.

## The Invitation

We invite you this Lenten season  
of reflection, study, and repentance  
to walk with us as we walk with Jesus  
the Way of Suffering  
to lives threatened with resurrection.

We invite you to accompany us  
as we accompany them  
those border crossers for justice  
who seek and work for peace  
who break down, break through, break open  
all the walls that separate and segregate us,  
break our bodies and spirits.

We invite you to accompany us  
on the vigil that leads to resurrection  
by facing those whose lives are constricted,  
restricted, and targeted;  
who ask you to stay awake and pray  
stop the destruction of trees,  
the demolition of homes,  
the burning of families and worship spaces,  
the stabbings and the shootings.

We invite you to bear the cross

We invite you to live  
with those dying daily  
to see in them  
Him calling out, weeping, rising up.

We invite you to join us  
this Lenten season  
in breaking down all the Walls  
that divide us  
in rolling away all the Stones  
that entomb us.

We invite you to live lives threatened with resurrection.

*\*Inspired by Guatemalan poet Julia Esquivel's poem *Threatened with Resurrection**

## Reflection 1: Breaking Expectations (Palm Sunday)

You surprise us, O God of surprises.  
The stories of our lives don't go as we expect,  
nor did the story of Jesus' life turn out as predicted.

Jesus broke expectations by accomplishing miracles ...  
such as raising his friend from the dead.  
O God, may our efforts to break down the wall of separation and suffering  
surprise and restore those who dwell in an occupied land.  
Jesus broke expectations for a mighty Messiah ...  
such as a humble donkey-entrance to the Holy City,  
cheered by the nobodies for a mission no one understood.  
May his spirit within us break open hardened hearts  
paralyzed by false notions of preferred status.  
Loving and patient God, teach us  
the nonviolent, dedicated and disciplined skills  
which make grotesque walls crumble.  
We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

*The Palm Sunday procession down the Mount of Olives should begin in Bethany or Al Eizariya, two miles from Jerusalem on the Jericho Road. This is the town where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. It is a traditional pilgrimage site. However, the village is now separated from Jerusalem by the Wall in order to make way for the illegal settlement of Ma'ale Adominm and its bypass roads. In addition to confiscating land the residents of modern day Al Eizariya either face high unemployment because they are separated from Jerusalem, their place of work or they have to move into East Jerusalem to retain their Jerusalem Identification. Furthermore, the Bedouins who live in the area face home demolitions regularly to make room for the illegal settlement.*



**It Stinks** by Nancy Amacher, EAPPI Jerusalem Team 2016

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for several days. “He stinks” replied the crowd when Jesus asked to see him. They were referring to the decaying body. Even today there are lots of things in Bethany that “stink”: Homes near a garbage dump; a Wall that prevents pilgrims from getting to the church of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha; a checkpoint through which residents of Bethany have to pass to get to Jerusalem; permits to enter the city that used to be theirs; and identification papers revoked for living now on the other side of the Wall. Furthermore, every male and under 35 has to get off the bus and walk through a security area and then get back on the bus when leaving the village.

In addition to the daily humiliation and oppression to the residents of Bethany, there are demolitions on nearby hilltops overlooking Bethany where a community of Bedouin have lived for decades.

Over steaming cups of sweet tea their leader Attalah relates the most recent round of demolitions. “They came early about three in the morning. Fifty vehicles and police and two

bull dozers. Three homes were demolished.” Attalah tells us how he tried to stop them....how the soldiers told him to go to his house, how he heard kids crying, how he tried to stop them again, how they put him in a military car until the conclusion of the demolition. He tells us that the people were scared. “Will they come again soon to demolish more homes and the structures that house their animals?”

Just as Mary and Martha waited for Jesus to get to Bethany, so today the residents of this beleaguered community, wonder when we will get to them. There is still a stench coming from Bethany.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. How do these facts about the village of Bethany affect you and your understanding of this Gospel story about Lazarus? How does the stink of Lazarus’ body connect to what stinks today?
2. Jesus breaks expectations by coming into Jerusalem on a humble donkey. He broke expectations of who or what a Messiah is. What kind of breakthroughs are you hoping for this season of Lent or this Palm Sunday?

### **Reflection 2: Breaking Bread (Maundy Thursday)**

Broken bread feeds the multitudes.

Bread shared from hand to hand

brings into focus the beautiful Body of Christ.

O God, let us receive a taste of your presence  
as a feast of solidarity with those who suffer.

We break bread with family, neighbors, spiritual communities and strangers.

In this we discover the New Creation of your Beloved Community:  
the Community where the Wall of Separation seems to dissolve.

Teach us to honor the bread we share,

the ones who grow its ingredients, and those who bake it for our use.

Show us how to see your face in one another,

and in this way become strong for the holy work of resistance.

As bread is given, received and shared,

allow our many minds and hearts to multiply

faithful efforts which no wall can withstand forever.

In Christ’s name we thank you for the bread. Amen.

*Dormition Abbey is a Benedictine Monastery on the slope of Mount Zion in Jerusalem where Mother Mary is said to have lived and died. In addition, it is next to the Cenacle which houses one of the possible sites for the Upper Room, the place Jesus celebrated The Last Supper. It is also the place where the risen Christ appeared to his disciples and where the Holy Spirit came down on them making it the place of the first church.*

*The Upper Room was a place of sanctuary for Jesus and the disciples in Roman occupied Jerusalem. As you read this news article, what thoughts come up for you today about this sacred site being attacked along with the other Christian holy site known for the Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes? Jesus broke bread in both of these places. He fed thousands and offered himself as living bread. Jesus lived during the time of the Roman occupation. Arab Christians are living now under the Israeli military occupation.*



**Settlers Spray “Slaughter the Christians” slogans on Walls of Jerusalem Monastery**  
 by Palestine National News, 1/17/2016

A group of extremist right-wing Israeli settlers on Sunday dawn have sprayed slogans that call on slaughtering Christians, on the walls of an old monastery in Jerusalem.

The slogans are thought to have been written by the extremist “Pay The Price” group, which has repeatedly attacked Palestinian homes, churches and mosques overnight, which included the church of loaves and fishes (Tabgha) in Tiberias, and mosques in Ramallah and Nablus.

Following the attack on the church back in May, The Rabbis for Human Rights group said that there have been 43 similar attacks against churches, mosques and monasteries in Israeli-occupied land, the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem since 2009, Reuters reported. Slogans read “Death for Christians, the enemies of Israel,” and calls to “Slaughter Christians and send them to hell,” in addition to anti-Christ words.

Israeli police claimed to have opened an investigation in the case, but the Jewish extremists are expected to not be punished under Israeli law.

According to the Israeli human rights group Yesh Din, Israeli police closed 85.3 percent of investigations due to the failure “to locate suspects or find sufficient evidence to indict suspects”; only 1.9 percent of Palestinian complaints against Israeli civilian/settler attacks resulted in a conviction, and 7.4 percent of investigations generated indictments against suspects.

Moreover, a Yesh Din report published this month found that in the past five years, only 3 percent of the criminal investigations launched by the Military Police Criminal Investigations Division into alleged offenses by Israeli soldiers against Palestinians resulted in the indictment of suspects.

These groups are also responsible for deadly attacks on Palestinian families. In July, they have torched the home of the Dawabsheh family overnight in Duma village near Nablus, killing 11-month-old baby Ali Dawabsheh and both his parents. Only one member of the family survived, Ahmad Dawabsheh (4), and he is still recovering in the ICU.

They are also suspected in the murder of Mohammad Abu Khdeir (16) whom they abducted and burned alive in July 2014 in Jerusalem.. Israeli Occupation Authorities claim to start an investigation, but often fail to hold the attackers accountable for their crimes, as in the Dawabsheh case, where Israel said that the evidence against the Jewish suspects was “not enough” to try them.

1. How does knowing that these sacred sites have been vandalized and even burned impact your understanding of these Gospel stories?
  2. How can we “honor the bread that we share?” How is the breaking of bread still a threat to empire?
- Editor would like to let readers know that in the case of the Dawabsheih attack Israeli police arrested and indicted 21 year old Israeli Jew and an unnamed minor on January 3,

2016. In the case of the burning alive of Abu Khdeir attackers were sentenced on February 4. One, 17 years old, was sentenced to life in prison (plus three years) while the other, a minor, was sentenced to 21 years in prison.

### Reflection 3: Breaking Bodies (Good Friday)

The crucifixion of Jesus breaks our hearts, O God.  
We cannot resolve the evil of violent death unleashed upon the innocent.  
We cannot accept destruction of youth, families,  
and communities broken by the State and destroyed by the Wall.  
Jesus on the cross stands for false incarceration; a sham trial;  
fickle and frightened crowds; torture and death;  
brutal, heartless intentions.  
“Shoot to kill” at checkpoints displays crucifixion.  
Bodies left to bleed demonstrate crucifixion.  
Fire-disfigured children; limbs broken with cold intent;  
internal injuries caused by rubber bullets ... all these show us crucifixion.  
O God, help us see what we must,  
but give us vision to see more than what meets the eye.  
Through your spirit give us courage, love and discipleship  
so we might honor fully the ones who are broken.  
Hear these words as our appeal through Jesus Christ. Amen.

*On Good Friday or Sad Friday as it is known in Palestine, we remember not only those who are being crucified daily through state sanctioned violence but also those who deserve the right to mourn. Our Gospel texts are rich with descriptions of what happened to Jesus on the cross but also about how he was prepared for burial afterwards. Contrast this story with the one below.*



Palestinians form a human chain around Jerusalem's Old City on 26 December, 2015 calling on Israel to return the bodies of Palestinians slain by its forces. Faiz Abu Rmeleh ActiveStills

Excerpt from **Why Did Israel Withhold Bodies of Slain Palestinians, Denying the Right to Mourn?** Tuesday, 05 January 2016 By *Chris Moore-Backman, Truthout | News Analysis*

On New Year's Day here in Hebron, after months of painstaking waiting and deliberations, the parents of 17 slain Palestinians finally received the bodies of their children. Killed by US-backed Israeli armed forces in and near Hebron over the course of the last three tumultuous months of 2015, and held by the Israeli government without explanation, the bodies of the Palestinians were finally brought to Hebron's al-Ahli Hospital in the early evening of January 1. Amid hundreds of fellow Palestinians who waited in solemn solidarity, the families of the deceased took the bodies of their loved ones home in order to prepare them to be honored and buried

the next day. (According to Islamic law, burials should happen as soon as possible following the time of death.)

For months now, in conversations initiated by international human rights workers, journalists and the occasional audacious tourist in Hebron, one question has flowed and continues to flow like a steady stream: Why did Israel refuse to restore the bodies of 17 slain Hebronites to their families for a period, not of days, not of weeks, but of months? It's a question that doesn't arise in conversations between Palestinians, however. When it comes to the Israeli occupation, after all, Palestinians know that the unanswerable is standard protocol.

In mid-November, several fathers of the deceased Palestinians from Hebron received permission from the International Red Cross to construct a makeshift tent in front of the IRC's Hebron headquarters. The fathers placed an empty coffin in front of the tent, in plain view of any and all pedestrians walking down Ein Sara Street. Inside the tent, the fathers began to hold vigil, and to repeat their simple motto to any who would stop to ask their purpose: "We need our children."

Negotiations with Israel's armed forces ensued. Israel pleaded no defense for the government's choice to keep the bodies of the slain young men and women in deep freeze. The Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center volunteered to represent the families during the negotiation process, and Hisham Sharabati, a coordinator and field worker with the Hebron Defense Committee, worked closely with the families as an advocate and adviser.

"At one point military officials offered to release five of the bodies," Sharabati explained, "but only on the condition that the families agree to hold their funerals at night with a limited number of mourners." The parents decided collectively to refuse these conditions. "The families were committed to getting each and every one of their children back," Sharabati said.

<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/34290-why-did-israel-withhold-bodies-of-slain-palestinians-denying-the-right-to-mourn>

1. Israel has said that they withheld the bodies of "alleged terrorists" for security purposes as funerals could be used to incite further hostility and acts of violence yet withholding the bodies is illegal under international law because it is considered a form of collective punishment. According to the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian and human rights law the withholding of bodies is illegal. What are your thoughts about this issue?
2. What do you think about these parents' refusal to accept the conditions for the return of their children? How is this refusal an act of resistance or solidarity?

#### **Reflection 4: Breaking Spirits (Holy Saturday)**

At times, O God, our spirits are broken.

At times, life does give us more than we can handle.

Injury, grief, diminishment and despair break the spirit within us.

In difficult days we pray for those who find their resilience depleted.

We pray for those detained or imprisoned.

We pray for children afraid to go to school in the morning

or to bed at night for fear of night raids..

We pray for families broken and destroyed by the Wall which keeps them from their lands.

We pray for young people who have lost the horizon for hope.

Break down the Wall, O God.

Allow those who are broken to heal.

Help us accompany them in their dark times,

we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

*Holy Saturday is traditionally regarded as a time of deep sorrow. Tradition holds that Jesus went down to Hell on the second day. Since mid September there has been an escalation of violence in*

*Occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Some call it the Third Intifada. It is being led by young people who have given up on the leadership to find a just peace. Ramzy Baroud from The Palestine Chronicle puts it this way, "So they rebel and attempt to mobilize and sustain their rebellion for as long as they can because they have no horizon outside their own action." The youth are not the only ones who have lost hope however so have many others including the Palestinian Christians.*

PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS HAVE 'LOST HOPE' IN SHADOW OF THE WALL  
12 January 2016 | by Judith Sudilovsky of the Catholic News Service

A US bishop visiting the Holy Land for the second year in a row said Palestinians whose land has been divided by the Israeli separation barrier "have lost hope".

"It was very sad to see the present situation where individuals have their lands confiscated and trees uprooted," said Bishop Oscar Cantu of Las Cruces, New Mexico. "This is a sign of something much larger. It seems to be a diminishing of the rights of Palestinians to be there and a lack of acknowledgment of their legitimate right to be present whether in the state of Israel or in Palestinian lands."

Bishop Cantu and 12 bishops from Europe, South Africa and North America visited the Cremisan Valley on Monday (10 January) as part of the Holy Land Coordination, in which they come to show solidarity with Palestinian Christians.

More than 55 Christian families had their land confiscated by Israelis in this agricultural valley adjacent to the village of Beit Jala to make room for the Israeli separation barrier, despite years of legal attempts to have the route of the barrier moved. The barrier is a series of cement slabs, barbed wire fences and security roads snaking across part of the valley.

Meeting with Cremisan Valley landowner Nakhleh Abu Eid, 76, who had 15 trees uprooted and lost free access to his remaining agricultural land, helped the bishops remember the situation was not "simply politics" but about "people's lives and about their dignity," said Bishop Cantu.

"They had held out hope the land would be saved," he said. "Getting their hopes up [only to have them broken] does no good."

Xavier Abu Eid, a Palestinian Authority spokesman and Nakhleh Abu Eid's nephew, told the group that the same young people who, last year, had been attending Mass every Friday to bring attention to their plight were now throwing rocks the Israeli checkpoint. "They have lost hope," said Bishop Cantu.

### Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus went into the depths of hell and rose from it. What does it mean for us to acknowledge or accept despair in ourselves or others?
2. How do we accompany those in Israel and Palestine who are without hope? Whose hand are you reaching out to?

### Reflection 5: Breaking Open (Easter Sunday)

The mystery of an empty tomb breaks us open to resurrection.  
The stirring of hope breaks us free from despair.

Thank you, O God for those waging life in war zones  
through color and art.



Thank you, O God, for the churches of Palestine.  
who bear witness to Easter all year long.

Thank you for those around the world who bring hope  
and possibility through divestment, boycott and sanctions.  
A quiet voice is growing louder.  
Cautious churches are discovering their voice.

Partnerships for justice transcend national borders.  
Interfaith activism erases false divisions between believers.  
Your spirit makes us one and keeps us strong.

May the Risen Christ dwell among us.  
May the Risen Christ find open doors,  
tank shells turned into flower pots  
all the stones removed, all the walls torn down.  
In His name we pray. Amen.

*He is risen! He is risen indeed! Death does not win. The Easter message is about the persistence of life, the overcoming of death. It is also about living lives that defy those things that try to repress or destroy our spirit. We are all called to live resurrected lives.*



Figure 1 photo by Helwa Ya Baboli

**Excerpt from Waging Life in a War Zone : From Gaza’s colorful neighborhood to its underground theater, resistance is an art** by Jen Marlowe posted Jan 12, 2016 in YES Magazine

Throughout Gaza Strip, painters, photographers, theater artists, musicians, and filmmakers are using their art not just as a form of therapy, but also as a tool of resistance.

“What we did in the street is a strong reply to the occupation,” al-Saedi explains, referring to Israel’s 48-year military occupation of the Palestinian territories. “The occupation insists on killing the Palestinian people and destroying us psychologically, culturally, and scientifically, in addition to destroying our civilization, history, and future. But the occupation will figure out that the Palestinian people can make life from death.” He points to war debris that had been converted into planters. “We say to Israel: Destroy as much as you’re able, and we’ll build and plant [again].”

Nayef receives Facebook messages from people all over Gaza Strip who want to start similar projects, but lack of resources limits expansion. Tamer Institute for Community Education, a local nonprofit established during the first Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation, and Kinder USA, founded by American physicians and humanitarian relief workers, have provided some much-appreciated support, but much of the funding has come from the pair's pockets. "We have many talented people," al-Saedi says. "[With enough resources,] you'd see something new daily."

A large tank shell lies overturned next to a community garden that they planted. The shell is a remnant of last summer's war on Gaza, in which 2,205 Palestinians and 71 Israelis were killed. Nayef lifts the missile upright and places a pink rose on its nose. "I'm going to make something beautiful from it," he says.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Why is making things beautiful called a form of resistance? What is the relationship between resistance and resurrection?
2. How are the churches choosing nonviolent resistance in the form of Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) demonstrating what it means to live resurrected lives?