



from Garth...

From Banksy's hotel in Bethlehem to the Anglican Cathedral in Jerusalem



On the 2nd of November I started the day in Bethlehem at the **Walled Off Hotel** - Banksy's hotel - right beside the devastating separation wall. In the morning he put on a remarkable street party with children from Aida Refugee Camp - it was like an old style jubilee party for the Queen, and lo and behold the Queen

appeared!

A Master of Ceremonies read a message from Banksy about the impact of the Balfour Declaration - because this day was the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. The Queen then pulled a string and some red curtains opened, and engraved in the wall was the word "Sorry".

The Amos walkers were there, part of the audience watching this. ([Click here for information about Amos Trust's Just Walk.](#)) They had walked all those miles to say 'sorry', and that afternoon we went into Jerusalem for a service in St George's Anglican Cathedral where I am an honorary Canon, and we had a liturgy which I had put together along with the Dean, Hosam Naoum. It was a liturgy of lament, repentance and new hope. It was a very special time.

Some of you may know my song that started the **Something for the Soul** album, *The Welcome (This is the house of God)* - I added two verses. The new words reflect the theme of the service, namely the attitude of penance for the heavily colonial Balfour Declaration which has ended up in giving the Palestinians years of suffering, and as the second verse says - it was:

A Time for quiet reflection
A moment of repentance
For the wrong that has been done
A Time for quiet reflection

And then in verse three I use some words of the liberation theologian Naim Ateek, who was to speak later in the service:

**Justice and only justice
Is the only way to peace
The only way to hope
Is through the door of justice.**

The theme was set and with prayers and songs we reflected on our reasons for being there. We talked about the historical context and then had a prayer of lament, repentance and yet new hope, and we all said:

"It is time to repent and apologise, it is time to make amends. It is time for fresh vision, for justice and for action."

And the prayer went on,
"Holy God, we ask that now there may be a generous spirit that supports both Palestinians and Israelis, that brings justice and peace, that treats all as equal human beings."

Amos Director Chris Rose came up and spoke, **reflecting the motivation that had prompted the walk, and apologising on behalf of Britain for the Balfour Declaration.** He was followed by Canon Naim Ateek, who gave a passionate talk about the injustice that had been done to the Palestinians. He also called on all the Amos walkers to stand and asked everyone to applaud them. Naim received a standing ovation himself at the end of his passionate and prophetic speech.

A little later on we had a prayer from Zoughbi Zoughbi, the Director of Wi'am Conflict Resolution Centre, a long time partner of Amos.

The choir we had booked to sing at the beginning, called the **Bethlehem Academy Choir**, which included Tarek, one of Zoughbi's sons, arrived late because they were held up at a checkpoint. Somehow this made the point for the whole event - this is

what life is like under occupation. They came and joined me as I was singing *Ten Measures of Beauty*, with its chorus “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem” and then at the end they joined us as we sang the great protest hymn *We Shall Overcome*. The audience linked arms and sang with all their might.

I saw eyes closed - I saw many eyes with tears. Then we got people to welcome the **Bethlehem Academy Choir** properly and they did two beautiful songs that finished our service in Arabic. It was a remarkable moment. As our walkers had travelled around Palestine, they were welcomed. Many people had heard Teresa May talk of being ‘proud’ of the Balfour Declaration - the Palestinians were shocked by this because of the suffering it had given them. **So British people arriving and apologising meant a lot.**



Singing in the Walled Off Hotel, Bethlehem

After the service I hurried on back to Bethlehem so that I was in time to do a concert at the Walled Off Hotel. This was a very enjoyable time, informal and relaxed. Long time guide and family friend Wisam Salsaa is the Manager of the hotel, and he made sure **the concert was live streamed and you can still see that here.**

As I sang I was facing the window of the hotel, and there is the huge separation wall just a few yards away, now with the word “Sorry” inscribed on it.

I sang a range of songs, mostly about Palestine, and then got a request for *No Injustice Will Last Forever*. Singing that while looking at the wall made me sing with great passion, “One day the wall will fall!”

What a way to spend this hundred year anniversary of injustice. Lament, repentance and yet new hope were the themes of the day.

Back to Nicaragua

A week before Gill and I went to Palestine we had been in Nicaragua. I was invited to sing and speak at the 45th anniversary

of Amos partner **CEPAD**. I love Nicaragua. It's a beautiful country. Yet it's one of the countries in the world that is most impacted by climate change and visiting it you discover in different ways what that might mean.



CEPAD
COUNCIL OF PROTESTANT
CHURCHES OF NICARAGUA

In the 1980s Oxfam wrote a book called *The Threat of a Good Example*, and it was about Nicaragua. I still think of that title when I am there. Forty-five years of CEPAD has been a tremendously good example – of caring for the needy, working as peacemakers, supporting people in poor rural communities - and we always get the chance to glimpse a little bit of this.

At the anniversary service I sang a new song of mine called *Against the Grain*, which is about Jesus coming into Jerusalem and taking a stand against the empire and turning tables of oppression, and how we need to be a community that builds an endless bridge to dignity by being a community that follows the example of the “holy rebel Jesus”, as the song puts it.

It was a huge joy to be back in Nicaragua and to join CEPAD for their 45th celebration. It was a full house at First Baptist Church, Managua including visitors from the US, Germany and us.

What a long way CEPAD has come since those early days after the appalling earthquake in 1972 when Gustavo Parajon brought church leaders together to serve the people. Ten years later CEPAD worked through the Civil War earning respect and becoming involved in peace and reconciliation.

Today, 2017, the main focus is on the development of rural areas in Nicaragua. The model CEPAD has evolved is not one of top down, handing out help and advice, but one of accompaniment and empowerment thus enabling communities themselves to identify and train up their own chosen representatives. **It is a model created by Gustavo which has been instrumental in the mentoring and inspiring of Amos Trust over the years. It is a model of friendship, cooperation and listening.**

Another day we went out to Teustepe, to the Amos project, and saw how a community had walked forward since we had previously been there, despite being devastated by recent hurricane Nate.

I have probably mentioned before, the amazing slogan of Daniel Ortega's



government - and they're about to have an election there – the slogan is “Cristiana, Socialista, Solidaria”, Christianity, Socialism and Solidarity. I have often thought, what other country would have a slogan like this? Their latest slogan talks of the Sandinista government winning but then says, “By the grace of God”. No government is

perfect, there are struggles in every community, but this is a government with a preference for the poor, one that seems to be trying to live out the values of justice and Jesus.

I have a song called *Yo Creo en Nicaragua*, and I finish my concerts and talks with it - the chorus is in Spanish and everyone joins in, and it is saying,

**I believe in Nicaragua,
I believe in the children,
I believe in tomorrow,
I believe in Nicaragua.**

**Yo creo en Nicaragua
Yo creo en los niños
Creo en el mañana
Yo creo en Nicaragua**

Prayer for Peace

God of many names
Lover of all people
We pray for peace
In our hearts
In our homes
In the land once known as holy
And throughout our world
We pray for peace to come - built on justice
For peace to come - built on equality for all
Amen



Goth Hewitt



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THE REVOLUTION
OF LOVE FROM
BETHLEHEM TO THE
ENDS OF THE EARTH



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