

# Grounds for Peace

## NAKBA DAY

### **'What is the significance of Nakba Day for Palestinians and peace in the Middle East?'**

**Josh Mangelson** 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

**Andrew Bolton** 00:33

So warm welcome to this Grounds for Peace podcast, a series that is part of Project Zion. Today we're asking the question, **'What is the significance of Nakba Day for Palestinians and peace in the Middle East?'**

In our conversation today about ISRAEL PALESTINE it is very important that we start by defining what we mean by Zion. Zion has different meanings for different groups, I want to explain what Zion means for Community of Christ. Community of Christ, is a religious movement that began in 1830, in the United States. Zion was the kingdom of God on earth, a reality of justice and peace. And today, we might say that Zion is the renewing, and greening of the earth to bless all generations. It's about embracing the worth of all persons, no exceptions, and working to end all oppression, including racism, bigotry, sexism, poverty, and war. So we want to be clear about our understanding of Zion. So you're comfortable because it's a loaded term. If we were to use biblical language, Zion, as I said, is the kingdom of God on earth for the blessing of all people. So Zion is a term we began using before, Jewish or Christian Zionism meant the return of the Jewish people to Israel, to the Holy Land. However, we were also affected by Christian Zionism, something we're now repenting of, because this led to the marginalization and oppression of Palestinians.

I'm your host, Andrew Bolton, currently living in Leicester, England, one of the most pluralistic cities in the world, and the only city in Europe with a non-white majority. Today's Grounds for Peace episode is a collaboration with our international Peace and Justice team of Community of Christ. And we're working for a just peace in Israel Palestine, guided by our church's World Conference Resolution of 2016.

So let's get down to the big question before us: **'What is the significance of Nakba Day for Palestinians and peace in the Middle East?'** So Bilal Al Issa is a third generation Palestinian living in Denmark, a board member of the Danish house in Palestine (DHIP). Did I get that right.?

**Bilal:** Yes.

**Andrew:** And then Daniel Bannoura, a Christian Palestinian from Bethlehem, born in Jerusalem, currently working intriguingly on a PhD on the Qu'ran at Notre Dame in the United States. So Bilal and Daniel, a very warm welcome to both of you. Thank you so much for being here.

So Daniel, perhaps we could start with you. Can you please explain what is meant by Nakba and what happened to Palestinians in 1947, and 1948?

**Daniel:** Thank you, Andrew. It's such a pleasure to be here with you and to share the stage with Bilal as we talk about the Nakba and the Palestinian narrative. This is an essential part of the Palestinian story, the Nakba that is, that for the most part in the West, the story of the Palestinians, their evictions and their ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, and the suffering that they have gone through has been largely ignored, and if not whitewash and justified by the media, by the political system, by even religious communities as well. So having these conversations are fundamental. I think it's important if you want to think about peace and think about justice and think about the end of the conflict and violence in Palestine as well. But yes, we have to start from the beginning to try to understand what is happening today. And actually a lot of what is happening today, a lot of the reasons for the persistence of the conflict, the kind of complex and convoluted reality that we have right now in Palestine Israel, goes back to the Nakba goes back about to that event. Nakba is the Arabic word for catastrophe. And it refers to a specific big shift and transformation that happened to Palestine, where Palestine historically before 1948 was predominantly Arab and Palestinian, where you have Palestinian Muslims, Palestinian Christians and Palestinian Jews living in Palestine as well as the newly arriving European Jews who arrived into Palestine from Europe driven by movement of Zionism, and especially catalyzed by, sped by the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe and the Holocaust and all the things that happened preceding 1948 that led to the mass exodus of Jews from Europe, and other countries into Palestine.

Now, specifically, the Nakba refers to the catastrophe that happened to the Palestinians as the war began in May of 1948. And even before the war in 1948, we can also talk about defense that kind of set the stage for the mass exodus of Palestinians and the ethnic cleansing what we call that a Palestine, within 1948, which are the number of like massacres committed against Palestinians, in an attack against the Palestinians in 1947, and so on, for example, I can think of right now, the massacre place? that [happened] in 1947. And other kinds of massacres committed, leading up to 1948. Now 1948 in May, on May 14 of 1948, as well, like you said the Jewish population of Palestine, the migrants from Europe, mostly from Europe, who came into Palestine eventually, independently, declare their independence over Palestine. And that, following the next day, that led to basically the right of the war that existed there, what the Israelis would call the war for independence, and what Palestinians called the Nakba, the catastrophe, which eventually led to the killing, and the eviction, and also the escape, of many Palestinians out of Palestine because of that war. And we're talking about 500,000 to 700,000 Palestinians who were either evicted, ethnically cleansed, or just escaped the violence and what's happening then in 1948, so this is we're talking about, something that happened 74 years ago.

So that is kind of the Nakba, which is basically the whole depopulation and dispossession of the Palestinians, in 1948, in 1948, because of the war. What makes Nakba pertinent, and what makes Nakba relevant for us today, this is not just an event in history, and we can talk about this and I think Bilal has more to say about this than I have as someone who is from the West Bank, who was not really directly impacted by the Nakba, is that the Nakba is ongoing. It's not that the Nakba happened 74 years ago, and it's over. But we still have the refugees, we have more than 5 million Palestinian refugees today, who are still living the out workings of that event, who are still not allowed to go back to their homeland, who are still refugees living in refugee camps. And the Palestinians are today still continue to be going through the Nakba of forced evictions, of ethnic cleansing, in the Negev, and in Jerusalem, and so on and so forth. So that's maybe that we can discuss that later during the podcast. But that's gonna hopefully this is helpful in placing the start, as a starting point as we think about Palestinian story and the Nakba.

**Andrew:** So thank you, Daniel. So if I was to summarize, Nakba is catastrophe in Arabic, disaster, and up to 700,000 Palestinian Arabs were ethnically cleansed or had to flee from their homeland. Bilal your family is one of the Palestinian families that fled. And you're a third generation Palestinian living now in exile in Denmark. Can you please tell us something about your story?

09:22

**Bilal:** Hello, Mr. Andrew, and thank you for inviting me here. I'm very happy to share the stage with Daniel as well. Actually, my story is not unique. It's basically the same story of hundreds, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, even millions of Palestinian refugees living around the world. I'm actually like, originally from a village called Al-Khalisa. It's on the far north east of the historic Palestine very close to the Golan Heights and to the border to Lebanon. It's just a very few kilometers from there. My grandparents, they used to live there. And they, like I, would speak about maybe my grandfather who's still living today. He was about 18 years old when he fled during the Nakba, the events of Nakba, where our village was ethnically cleansed from the militias of the Zionist militias of Irgun and, and Haganah. They fled to Lebanon, the people who were remained in this village were all killed. So actually, this village, like 540 other villages that were completely ethnically cleansed. They fled to Lebanon, my grandfather, he lived in Lebanon in a refugee camp to start with in the Lalazarta for the most of the time.

My parents are born in the camp of Lalazarta, it's in Beirut, in Lebanon. And during the Lebanese civil war, they have been victims of also a massacre and an ethnic cleansing of this camp. After that, they moved to different places in Lebanon, and they ended up in Shatila refugee camp and some of my family, one of my grandfather's he was also one of the survivors of the Sabra and Shatila massacre in Lebanon. Well, I'm, I'm born in Lebanon in '87. I was a little kid, and because of the Civil War, and also the Lebanese invasion that took place in '82. We have we have been forced to fled out of flee out of, of Lebanon. And we ended up there by accident in Denmark, actually.

So yeah, I have been living in Denmark, since I was a little kid. And yeah, I am, as you say, a third generation refugee. My parents are refugees. My grandparents are refugees. My grandfather is still his 91 years old today. And he's still living in the refugee camp of Shatila in

Lebanon. And it's basically just maybe 150 kilometres away from his own village that he has not been able to visit for 73 or 74 years since 1948. And the thing is, like, while I was living in Palestine, and working in Palestine for some years, I've been visiting this village, I have also sent the videos and pictures and shared them with my grandfather. And the thing that was very unique for me to experience was that he actually could, that is still remembering the places where people lived, where the mosque is, where the schools, where the school was, the cemetery for the family and for the people in the village, where they were, what happened like he, he still can remember, remember, and they have also lived in at work in Haifa for few years. And when I shared with him some of pictures from the old city of Haifa, he could actually recognize them like wedding snaps and the port of Haifa. So, for me, it was very great and touching experience to see. And it's also very hard to see your own grandfather, he will after like 74 years and he's still waiting to get back and he's still hoping for it you know. But as I said it's not a unique story. It's actually basically the same story as millions of Palestinians. Yeah.

**Andrew Bolton** 14:23

So thank you for sharing that. So you you go back to Palestine to visit family?

14:35

**Bilal:** No, I don't have any family in Palestine. Actually, my whole family they fled to Lebanon in 1948. Okay remained in Palestine. But I was I traveled to Palestine and I was living in Palestine to work for a Danish NGO, the Danish House in Palestine. So I have actually lived in Palestine for, in Ramallah, for four or five years.

**Andrew Bolton** 14:59

Okay. Okay. So Nakba day is May the 15th every year, and events are remembered from 1947, 48. But you were saying Daniel that Palestinians are still losing their homes, they're still being dispossessed. So Nakba is something that continues today. So perhaps Bilal from your, your work on the West Bank and Daniel, do you want to say a little bit about that?

**Daniel:** I can start. I kind of made the point about the ongoing Nakba, for two things, for one Bilal, and the other Palestinians who are refugees today, or their families, are still not allowed to go back to Palestine. The vast majority of refugees, I think that Bilal is an exception was able to make it to back to the West Bank of Palestine in general, the vast majority of them and refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon and Syria are still not allowed to go back. And if you if you've been to Palestine, if you've been to any of the refugee camps, you will see the key as a symbol as a as used by all refugees, to symbolize the homes. So they locked up their homes, they thought they would come back within a few months or a few days, or maybe a year or so. So they still have the keys to their homes, but they have no access to them. And now the homes were either razed to the ground like like what happened to Bilal's village in Al-Khalisa and also like different villages, ....., or Contura, or other villages, or now these homes are now occupied by by Jewish Israelis. Like for example, we'll see this in Jerusalem specifically and also other towns in what is today called Israel, like Haifa, and Jaffa and so on and so forth. And now they've been replaced by by Jewish populations.

And so it is it is ongoing in the sense that the ethnic cleansing is still maintained and continuously, Palestinians have not been given access back to the lands, there is a right what

we call the right of return per international law, per UN resolutions. Palestinian refugees, like Bilal, and the 5 million Palestinians have a right, guaranteed by international law to go back to the land. Now that law is not being taken seriously by Israel, is not being followed, Israel as well rejects that law, because for them it's what's, what Israel calls the demographic threat. It is a threat to what should be considered a very racist definition that Israel is a land, is a country for the Jewish people. So by giving Palestinians the right to their lands and their homes that is a threat to that racist ideology of what we call Zionism. So that's one aspect of the refugee problem is and that still continues to be the one the biggest, perhaps sticky issue when it comes to the peace process. Secondly, the ethnic cleansing continues. The Nakba continues, I refer to what's happening to the Negev to the desert in Palestine right now in the south southern Israel, where Palestinians have been, and for the last few months have been pushed back, pushed out of their villages, in Venego. We're talking about the process of the forced, quote unquote, "legal" dispossession and forced evictions of Palestinians from different areas in what is in under Israeli control, especially East Jerusalem.

So if you remember from the events of last year, that the whole kind of war on Gaza began because of Israeli ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. And that continues in Silwan, continues in many areas among East Jerusalem, and especially also the Old City, where there is a legal effort, and also financial effort by Israel to deArabise parts of Jerusalem by forcing the Palestinians legally, by following some kind of legal, you know, gymnastics and procedures, that is not always in sport, and also by financial incentives to give to basically incentivize Palestinians to buy, to sell, sell their property. Basically, then pushing them out and then replacing the Palestinians with Jewish settlers.

19:36

So it continues, refugees continue to be refugees today, and Israel in many different ways financial, legal, political, keeps forcing, and deArabising and Judifying, if you will, Palestinian areas by moving the Palestinian populations and replacing that. population in different ways with Jews. Happens and continues to happen in the Old City, continues to happen in East Jerusalem and in different areas around Palestine.

**Andrew Bolton:** So thank you for sharing that awful story. Bilal is there anything you want to add?

20:11

**Bilal:** Actually, like the one thing like I totally agree with what Daniel says. The Nakba is still ongoing. We have seen it in the recent events. And actually, these events that we saw in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan and other places are just some of these things that are going on. There are many places that people don't know about the not covered enough in the country. We can see it on the north of the West Bank, inside the West Bank, south of the West Bank, Hebron. We can see it. And we have the siege of Gaza, we, we cannot forget that. This way to, yeah to sanction, like by a collective punishment, sanction a whole people of too many, a population of 2 million people, civilians in Gaza, by starving them to death. It's like, it's horrible, you know. And we have seen also that I want to highlight in 2018, (20)17 was the nation state bill that the Israeli government they passed. And this actually gives, like, it says directly that it gives the the unique right to self determination is only unique to the Jewish people, not to the

Israelis, or people with Israeli passport. It's only unique to the people like to the Jewish people. And this gives also Israel, Israel gives themselves the right to actually continue the ethnic cleansing, continue the apartheid system that is going on and that have been going on for many years in the country.

**Andrew Bolton** 22:07

So thank you. So what's strange for me is that nearly everybody in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, knows about the Holocaust. So very few people know about Nakba and the suffering of the Palestinian people, I guess, because there's a bias in the media. So both the Holocaust and Nakba are terrible human tragedies. And it's difficult to ask this question, but is there a connection between the two, between Holocaust and Nakba? Maybe Daniel, do you want to tackle this one first? It's a horrible question.

**Daniel:** Yeah, this is a tough one. Because I don't want to I don't, I have to be careful not to undermine or reduce or even use the Holocaust, at the expense of legitimate suffering with many Jews around the world.

There's a reason I think, just go back to your point that no one has heard of the Nakba. I think it has to do with a lot of things. One of them among them is chiefly among them is that 5 million or 6 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust. Thousands of Palestinians were killed during the Nakba. So it's not really similar in that quantity, perhaps. And but the problem is that while, we cannot really quantify suffering and trauma and pain. In many respects the Nakba is the Holocaust of us, ie the most devastating and impactful and traumatic experience of the Palestinians. I can do that Holocaust for that. They are not similar. They're different. But it's it's as tragic for the Palestinians as the Holocaust is tragic and impactful as it is for us, or for Jews in general.

Now, the connections between the two are, I think, are very, very obvious to me in different ways. And thankfully, I'm very thankful for a lot of Jewish rabbis and Jewish intellectuals and activists who have kind of helped us as Palestinians navigate what that looks like and to understand the inflection, the intersectionality from the Palestinian suffering and how do they, how the Nakba relates to the Holocaust. So this is not coming from me this is not me tokenizing or abusing the legacy of the Holocaust. This is something that we're hearing from Jews, Jewish intellectuals [...not clear].

Now, historically speaking, the Holocaust led to the Nakba and this is this is very clear. We see the influx, the massive influx and the increase of the number of Jewish migrants into Palestine during the Second World War, and especially right after the Holocaust, like hundreds of thousands of Jews migrated to Palestine eventually the Jews desire to have that independence that they wanted, and that led to the Declaration of Independence and therefore to the, to the Nakba. So these are not inseparable. And we have to, we have to recognize this, that those who survived the Holocaust, the descendants of the survivors, and the survivors themselves initiated the war, the war and the conflict that led to the Palestinian event.

Now, this makes us this is a very sensitive issue where like we were saying that the victims have been victimizers, but those who were oppressed, horribly treated in Europe, now have

suddenly have become powerful and dominant. And this has to do a lot with colonialism, and how the West and especially the British Empire, aided and abetted the Jewish domination over Palestine, and we still kind of suffer from that. So this is important for the British listeners here as well to understand how the British Empire has led to a lot of this.

But now, now, the traumatized and the victim have suddenly become those who are in power, who have been weaponized by the British, and have been able to assume control upon Palestine. And they had led to the Palestinian catastrophe, the Nakba. And it is the descendants of the Holocaust, for the most part, who led the massacres committed Deir Yassin and the other kind of villages that were ethnically cleansed and the massacres of Palestinians. And so that's the one point is that now the victim has become the victimizer and that's a very uncomfortable kind of conversation to have, especially because Holocaust you see, the Holocaust narrative has been weaponized. One to defend, to give blanket support and defense of Israeli policies in Palestine. So whenever Palestinians have spoken up against Israel, aggression, and they have been continuously compared to the Holocaust, and the suffering of the Jews, and the work and the memory of, of Jews have been used to silence, and to character assassinate, to vilify Palestinian activists, and those ...(not clear)

27:07

So that is kind of a tragedy that the Holocaust has been become a weapon. And rather than us reflecting, and for many reflecting on the Holocaust, as this monumental pivot pivot, a pivot point for us to reflect on racism and violence and stereotyping. It's now been used to stereotype and vilify and attack and silence, and even accuse Palestinians and their allies of being anti-semitic because of the Holocaust.

Now, thankfully, in our in our Jewish friends, are speaking up about this, and they're saying not in our name. We're used, we use the memory of the Holocaust, to turn a blind eye to the suffering of the Palestinians. And it's because of the legacy of the Holocaust, because of the legacy of the survivors and the victims of the Holocaust, Jews are saying, many Jews, especially what we can call anti-Zionist Jews are saying, because of the Holocaust, and because of our faith as Jews, we refuse to justify and victimize Palestinians.

And because of the legacy of the Holocaust, what we have learned from the Holocaust is that it is awful, it is criminal to stereotype, and to vilify, and to attack, and murder people because of their ethnicity, and their background, or their religion. And that's what happened to Jews in Europe. And by the same token, in the same breath, we're saying just because, just because of the Holocaust, we need to stand against the victimization and suffering of the Palestinians.

So it's not, this is not a dual narrative. It's not "us versus them", because of the Holocaust, because of the foreign evil of anti-semitism we are saying, the Israeli victimization of Palestinians what Bilal said, the apartheid that has been practiced in Palestine, which is now known as a fact, and we have been saying this for years, and now it's been affirmed by human rights organizations globally, whether Israeli organizations like B'Tselem or other international ones, like Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International, this is a system of apartheid.

And it's because of the Holocaust because of anti-Semitism and our struggle against anti-Semitism, we're saying, we have to reckon with the Nakba, we have to reckon with Israeli policies, and we have to stand for justice for the Palestinians. So hopefully, that's going to make sense and hopefully will help us also one as Palestinians also.

And this is very hard for us as Palestinians to also reckon with the trauma and the pain of the Holocaust, and how that informs the psyche and act and the action of Israel today, but also to use the Holocaust, and to learn from the Holocaust in standing up for justice for Palestinians. And that's why this is where Jews and Palestinians come to come together in their defense of rights, equality and justice for the Palestinians, as well as security and rights for the Jews

whether Palestine or Israel or ... (not clear). So that intersectionalities there. And thankfully, we have been able to connect and, and not kind of meet on that bridge in our fight and struggle against racism. So whether it's anti-Semitism or whether it's anti-Palestinianism, whether it's racism in different forms and shapes, all of us are united in the struggle against injustice, and that, that engages with the Nakba. And that also engages with other forms of anti-Semitism. And both of us are united in that we should be at least united that not in our name. And we need to stand against racism in any, any way, shape and form.

**Andrew:** So thank you, Daniel. Is there anything you want to add Bilal?

30:45

**Bilal:** No, I think it's very well covered. Like, I would say that for the international community, it's actually the responsibility to stand up for any people who get oppressed. They didn't stand up for during the Holocaust, because it took place actually in Europe. But we have seen that they stood up against the apartheid regime in South Africa. And right now, we are actually seeing that the international community and the governments are standing up for the Ukrainian people. And this is actually a very good example that boycott and sanctions is very effective, and it could be very, very effective, and could lead to results, you know. This is actually a textbook example of BDS campaign, what is happening in against Russia. So I think that when we are comparing, like Ukraine, with Palestine, Ukraine, it's just few months ago that the crisis started. But the Palestinians have been living under this occupation and oppression for 74 years. So we have, like, as Europeans, as the international community, there is a very big responsibility towards the Palestinians and towards any people who get oppressed.

**Andrew Bolton** 32:13

So what I'm hearing in a way is you're saying human rights for all people..

**Bilal:** Of course

**Andrew:** without exceptions,

**Bilal:** Of course, without exceptions.

**Andrew:** Both of you are saying that. So for our listeners, the Amnesty International report, that compared the occupation to apartheid, was published the first of February this year, and



it's going to be in the program notes, so you can look it up. And there's an executive summary of that, so you don't have to read the whole report, to sense Amnesty's human rights criticism of what's happening to Palestinians at this time.

Daniel, it's a surprise to perhaps many of us that there are both Muslim and Christian Palestinians. Here you are born in Jerusalem, lived and grew up in Bethlehem. Bethlehem, by the way, is where my wife and I became engaged. So we're part of this story. So can you please tell us something about the continuing presence over centuries of Palestine, Palestinian Christians?

**Daniel:** Yeah, no, that's very good. Just a quick point, that it's surprising why it is surprising that we, that we know about Arab Christians or Palestinian Christians? This has to do with very ignorant, naive understanding of the East, that has to do with colonialism, or with Western imperialism, or where the West sees itself in opposition to the East, and the East is conceived or imagined to be Muslim, or to be Arab, or to be violent. And so when when you when you talk about Arab Christians, or Palestinian Christians, like we complicate the story, and then the West, the kind of colonial Western imagination, it's, you would rather have it simple, like black and white. We are the good guys. These are the bad guys. So a lot of that ignorance is coming from that Imperial point in mentality of "us versus them".

Now, yeah, this is so it should not be surprising, like it should not be surprising that there are Palestinian Christians or that we have Arab Christians. Actually, we have, we have had thriving, incredible communities of Christians living in the Middle East since the beginning of Christianity. And actually, I say this rhetorically, but I am a descendant of the Church of Pentecost, the church of Jerusalem and Acts. That the church, the Palestinians church from Jerusalem, was the first church. We continue, and we have been, and we continue to be the descendants of the first church of Pentecost. Christianity, if anything is an Eastern religion, it began in Palestine, and spread and my ancestors are those who shared the gospel with, you know, Western, you know your ancestors in the West. Because actually, Christianity comes from Palestine and should not be surprising to anyone that there is a church in Palestine, or in Egypt, or in Lebanon, or Syria or in Iraq. And these can these countries continue to have very important Christian communities.

Now, the since and maybe perhaps, I guess, my religious identity relates to the next item, to the Nakba event. And so far as Palestinian Christians used to be 10%, or 11%, of the population of Palestine in the early 20th century. And they were very, they were very well off, educated and played a significant role in the rise of Arab nationalism, and Palestinian nationalism, and literature, and arts, and so on and so forth. But with the establishment of the State of Israel, and with the catastrophe of the Nakba many Palestinian Christians up and left. Of course, they were forced to leave. So Bilal might know more about this than I do. There are a number there's at least I can think of two refugee camps in Lebanon, that are predominantly Christian, and Christian Palestinians living in these in these refugee camps. A lot of them move to Jordan. And so there's a sizable Palestinian Christian Jordanian population that is listed in Jordan. And also a lot of them moved also to Europe, and to the US, and especially also Latin America is a very sizable minority Arab Christians in Latin American countries, and so on and so forth.

37:00

So, it is surprising insofar as it is a result of what's been happening to the Palestinians, and for 10%, to now go down to now our numbers in Palestine of about two, 2% of the population. So talking about a significant drop. And that's has huge ramifications on the identity of Palestine and the struggle for Palestine. Especially because that's what has been successful in clouding and obfuscating the reality of the ground and making the conflict the religious one between Jews and Muslims. And it was never a religious conflict. It's been a very ethnocentric, and very racist conflict between Jewish domination control and domination over the whole population of Palestinians, whether it's Palestinian Christians or Palestinian Muslims. But then, by silencing or ignoring Palestinian Christians, it makes that narrative work for the Western imagination to think, "Okay, this is our religious conflict." Muslims are scary, and weird, and different than us, we adopt a Jewish Judeo Christian legacy. So therefore, we have to stand with Jews. And this can explain a lot of the North American support for Israel, the US and Canada, also in many parts of the world, because of that kind of racist identity, politics that is used to justify the colonization at least, or turn a blind eye to the suffering of Palestinians. So hopefully, that helps.

Also, there's a bit of Christian Zionism that plays a role in this and how Christian Zionists have been trying effectively, to paint that narrative as well. And to force that biblical interpretation, to frame the conversation on the conflict in terms of Old Testament tropes, a conflict between Isaac and Ishmael, causing conflict between Arabs and Jews. And by doing so they can ignore the presence of Palestinian Christians. But that's also another kind of messy kind of worms to deal with.

And now we're just going to finish your brief briefly, maybe I'm spending too much time on this. Israel just announced a few days ago, like two days ago that we would want to limit the participation of Christians, Palestinian Christians in Easter celebrations in Jerusalem. I think they limited the number to 500 Christians who were able to actually go into the church for Passion for Passion Week, for Good Friday and Sunday, and so on, so forth. And the church has broken out against this. They refuse this kind of way to control worship and celebration of Easter. So this is kind of one more example of how the, the conflict or the struggle the Palestinian struggle has to be framed in terms of racism and apartheid, against Jews – sorry - against Palestinian Christians and against Palestinian Muslims.

**Andrew:** Thank you, Daniel. So I like the story of you're descended from the Jerusalem church 2,000 years ago. That's a very good story. And a good reminder to me and to our listeners, that the Jesus movement was first of all, a Palestinian movement. So I want to just ask another Christian question to Daniel, excuse me, Bilal for doing that. So tell us a little bit about your own Christian commitment. And what denomination do you belong to, who you are influenced by and so on.

**Daniel:** So I belong to historically speaking of timeline, Greek Orthodox. My family, that are Bannoura family is an Orthodox family. The vast, historically speaking, the majority of Palestinians, Palestinian Christians are come from the Greek Orthodox Church, the Orthodox, the local Eastern Church of the Levant. As of now, I identify as Protestant, my actually, my

father is a Baptist pastor. I had been attending the Lutheran church for the last, before moving back to the US, had been attending the Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, that Christmas Lutheran church in Bethlehem. So, I identify mostly as Protestant, influenced heavily by Mennonites and Mennonite thinking. Growing up I was heavily impacted by the writings of John Yoder, and more recently by a person called Stanley Hauerwas, at Duke Divinity, very influenced by pacifism and kind of ethic, ethics of the kingdom, and non violence and pacifism.

41:56

But yeah, so I hold that complex identity of someone who is historically Orthodox, identifying as Protestant, but even within my Protestant identity, it's a very confusing one. I'm very, very interested in in the ecumenical conversation about unity of the church, and how we find in our diversity, ways for us to unite together and celebrate beauty and diversity of the faith, versus adopting a very specific, collegial or denominational, identity of going against other ones. So I think that's an important kind of move, we have to also make in this day and age, to celebrate our diversity and engage in healthy conversations, and also fellowship together within that. But that's, that's another conversation for a different time.

**Andrew:** So thank you. So I liked the fact you're influenced by the Anabaptists, this pacifist movement, this historic Peace Church. And I've been to..., Jewell and I went to the Lutheran service in a Lutheran Church in the Old City in Jerusalem, and it was a wonderful sermon. So we were really inspired by that.

Let me ask, move us on now to talk about political scientists, like Samuel P. Huntington, who in the 1990s, wrote about the "Clash of Civilizations." This includes a clash of religious cultures. So according to this perspective, Israelis and Palestinians can never have peace because of the ancient and unresolvable tension between Jews, Muslims, and Christians in the Holy Land. Is this true? Is this conflict about religion? Bilal, do you want to start this easy question?!

43:58

**Bilal:** Absolutely not. Actually, this is actually like when we look at what's happening. We are we are seeing forced displacement of Palestinians. We are seeing the ethnic cleansing, we are seeing the status quo, where we see a situation where Jewish only housing, Jewish only roads, color coded license plates. We are seeing people who are actually fighting for basic human rights, they're fighting for the right to the access to water, the right to access to electricity, the right to have a free movement, for the freedom of movement in their own country, where, like it's actually a military occupation, that that is what the fight is about. It's nothing to do with the religion.

And I can tell you if I was living in a house and my own brother was a Muslim, who would come and kick me out from my house, I would resist, I would struggle against them. And I will try to kick him out again in order to get my own right. So it's nothing to do with religion, it's just, in my opinion, just by accident that it's actually between some Jews, some, not all of them, because the most of the Jews are not Israelis. We have many other Jews living all around the world, you know. And we have also in the Israeli army, we have also Arabs, who, with Muslim background, doing military service in the Israeli army. And we, as Palestinians began, we

consider them as enemy, because they're actually helping the occupiers to occupy to oppress us, you know.

So it's not about religion, I can understand why the Zionist movement tried to try to promote this cause as a religious fight and the religious disagreement if we can say, because it's, if we, if we read the independence declaration of the State of Israel, it was only about religion, it was only about the Jewish people, the Promised Land. And that are coming back after 2000 years. It is as if that God is a real estate agent, when you go to Sheikh Jarrah and say that this house, it belonged to us 2000 years ago, well, this house didn't exist 2,000 years ago, it's only 50 years ago, it existed, you know, I don't really have anything to say to that. And I can also talk maybe a little bit about my personal relation with like, when, and my experience when I was living in Palestine. Like, it's maybe one of the very, very few places in the Middle East, I have been living in Egypt, in Lebanon, and in Palestine. It's one of the very few places in the Middle East, where you can't see any difference between a Palestinian Christian and Palestinian Muslim, I have actually friends that I have slept by and been in their houses, and I still cannot tell you if they are Muslim, or Christians. And this is actually a very good thing, because it's not an issue. We see our which we see each other as humans. And what connects us is actually our love for Palestine and the human values.

**Andrew Bolton** 47:52

So thank you. Let me and I think you would agree with with Bilall on this, Daniel, right. That is not about religion. You said that once to me, it's about the occupation, about the military occupation.

**Daniel:** So that's for sure. I mean, this is I think it is very, very evident. Israel would like to I mean, Israel and its designers, apologists would love to claim that we're in this conflict. because it knows and they know that framing it in that way is is impactful and powerful for the West, and helps justifying and whitewashing and whitewashing apartheid and, and racism and violence, for sure. And like I said, you know, many Jews are saying this is not acceptable, not in our view.

Many Christians and like myself, like many, like most Christian Palestinians, and like many Christians in the West, are standing up to this and saying, and refusing to weaponize the Bible, and what denies faith to vilify and attack and be violent towards Muslims. So for sure, I mean, this is something we have to be aware of and fight against it and fundamentally our struggle is against race, is against apartheid, is against the dispossession, disenfranchisement of Palestinians, the reclamation of the rights and their freedoms and their liberty per international law and the resolution of ...(not clear).

So this is not a religious issue. It's an it's a moral issue fundamentally. And and it's a it's a legal issue of rights, and dignity, and so on, so forth. And if we want to use religion, then let's use religion properly. And let's read the Bible properly. And as our theology is our meaning of the Bible driven by racism, and "us versus them", by some kind of particular, very flawed and very problematic readings of the text, that try to tries to wedge between people? Or is it driven by a vision of creating a beloved community, creating a good news, a gospel of truth and goodness, and life for everyone. And not just Jews versus Palestinians" are not just "Christians against

others”, but having a universal vision of worth and justice and peace, that is grounded in biblical mandates about justice, around justice, about seeking justice and loving mercy, about this ability with everyone and, and loving the enemy. And a sense of restoration and a vision of a prophetic sense of restoration, and wholeness, that the Bible proclaims. So that's our how we read the text, yes, please read the Bible, please use your faith and Jews and Muslims and Christians can find plenty and their traditions to emphasize these issues of justice and equality and freedom and dignity. But we should not be there, not use the Bible and use religion to justify violence and hate and war.

And that's what's been happening by many. And that's what many have been doing to justify the colonisation and the apartheid of Palestinians.

**Andrew:** So let me come to a final question now. Thank you for sharing so much already. So what can friends and members of Community of Christ do to help move things forward to a just peace in Israel Palestine, so that Israelis and Palestinians, Muslims, Christians and Jews all have dignity, and a good future for their children with peace and justice? So what can we do in Britain and the United States and Europe? In Australia? Bilal do you want to go first?

51:55

**Bilal:** Okay, I can go first. I think the simple answer is to keep talking about Palestine, keep speaking about Palestine. There are many events happening, many campaigns, there are so many issues that we can speak about right now that are very, very, very actual. So I think that people should keep speaking about Palestine keep focusing about Palestine. If you go to a supermarket, look at the dates that you're buying from the supermarket, if they're Israeli or not. Go to your workers union and see if there's any investments in Israeli in any companies that are complicit in the Israeli settlement buildings. Work like try to vote your municipality elections, and the governmental elections, for people who will who are seeking justice, and will speak out against the oppression of Palestinians. Try to put the Palestine on the agenda in any way possible. I think this is something that will help.

Another thing that I would encourage people to do is to come to Palestine, visit Palestine. There are so many things to experience. Maybe Daniel and I could speak for hours. But it's not the same when you go to Palestine and experience it, when you go to Jerusalem. When you go to Hebron, when you go to Bethlehem, when you go to Nablus, when you go to Haifa, M...? and Nazareth, as you know. So I would really encourage people to go there. There are so many good Palestinian activists, organizations, human rights organizations, guides, that would be so happy to speak to you, and also inform you about what's happening. Visit the families there to try to connect with the Palestinians and all levels. I think this is something that could make a difference. And this is also something that is that gives the feeling for us as Palestinians that we are recognized. And we have actually some people who are have solidarity with us and ready to support us in our struggle against occupation.

**Andrew Bolton** 54:32

Oh, thank you. So in 2014, Jewell and I went on a study tour with Churches for Middle East Peace based in Washington, DC. Eight days, we had a Palestinian guide and we had an Israeli guide, and we visited activists on the West Bank and activists in Israel. It was a wonderful trip.

So I do recommend a dual narrative tour and *Churches for Middle East Peace* is maybe a good place to start. One of our friends from France joined us, so you can go on their tours wherever you live. So, Daniel, what can we do?

**Daniel:** There's so much you can do, I for sure second what Bilal says. You need to what we put it this way, "Come and see" and then "Go and tell." Come to Palestine, see what life is like and then go and speak about what's happening. So that's the kind of basic thing you can do.

Secondly, you can educate yourself, you have a lot of privilege, you have a lot of access to resources, to information, books, to the internet, there's a lot out there. So you have no excuse to be ignorant. or naïve, or apathetic, about this issue. So there's, there's, there's a work that we can do to educate yourself and to understand what's happening. And if anything that Bilal and I said, like, for example, when we use the words like 'apartheid', or 'ethnic cleansing', these words are not [coming out of nothing]. There are many books, many reports written on this stuff. So do your due diligence and go to the issue in good faith and try to understand what we're saying. So come and see, educate yourself.

And also use your resources whether financially to support Palestinian organizations. Bilal mentioned some phenomenal organizations doing incredible work, whether in response to the occupation to the military, and to the racism that we deal with, but also incredible organizations are doing amazing work amongst women, children and refugees and so on, fantastic organizations all over Palestine.

Also, if you're more in the more theologically inclined and were interested in supporting ministries, and Christian organizations or Muslim organizations, even Jewish organizations there's a fantastic work and as a fantastic network of organizations doing that work on the ground.

And lastly, I would say you need to examine your theology, you need to know like you need to reassess how you read the Bible and how you have been using the Bible. And if you've been using the Bible to justify violence, and to turn a blind eye, and to whitewash the sufferings of Palestinians, I think instead of using the Bible to do that, to do so, I think you need to start a bit and re-examine these presuppositions and the kind of exegetical moves you're making, and try to read the Bible in a way that actually is bringing, that brings about life, and goodness, and justice, rather than a continuation of the hurt and the suffering, and the trauma of Palestinians.

So there's a lot that we can do, and then on on the more activist way or the activist way, write your representative, go on demonstrations, connect with Palestine focused organizations in North America, wherever you are, and educate your church members about what's happening. Influence the public discourse about this issue so, so, so, much.

So yes, I mean, we Bilal and I can share our story and our narratives and so on. But really, we need you to come alongside us and help in the struggle that we're working with us to serve for freedom and justice.

**Andrew Bolton** 58:28

So thank you. So thank you Bilal for joining us from Denmark. And thank you, Daniel, from, for joining us from Notre Dame in Indiana, while helping us understand in a better way Nakba day.

And to you, our listeners, we hope this podcast helps you understand a little of the suffering that comes from the continuing occupation of Palestinians, by Israel. Quoting Psalm 122, verse six, I invite our listeners to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem”, for the peace of the Holy Land. Continue to find out as Daniel has said, as Bilal has said, what's going on from reliable news sources. And perhaps one book I might recommend is the “Other side of the Wall - a Palestinian Christian narrative of Lament and Hope”, by Munther Isaac, who is academic dean of the Bethlehem Bible College in Palestine, and director currently of the ‘Christ at the Checkpoint Conference.’ I'm currently reading that book, and details of the book are in the notes for this podcast.

This is grounds for peace part Project Zion Podcast. I'm Andrew Bolton, thank you for joining us. Thank you, to you Bilal and Daniel for sharing with us.

59:52

**Bilal:** Thank you.

59:54

**Daniel:** Thank you for having us.

**Josh Mangelson** 1:00:03

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