

## “The Spirit of Reconciliation”

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Whenever the world seems to be completely out of control and I am in despair, I remember a question we used to ask in school at such times: what is God doing in this situation? Or perhaps to bring into it human experience it is better to ask what is God enabling and requiring to be done in this situation?

During the beginning of the Iraq war, someone at my school posted a photo of a soldier carrying a young girl away from a bombed out area. They wrote across the bottom of the photo: “This is what God is doing in Iraq.” Enabling and requiring that soldier to carry that girl to safety.

This week I have in my mind been revisiting a story I heard eight or ten years ago when an Israeli man named Rami Elhanan and a Palestinian man named Mazen Faraj came to speak in an Atlanta church about their work together.

Rami Elhanan’s daughter was killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber in Jerusalem when she was fourteen. He had never met a Palestinian but he hated them all.

After his daughter died, a friend asked him to come to a group called The Parents Circle - Family Forum, which is made up of both Israelis and Palestinians who have lost family members to violence in the continuing conflict among their people in the Middle East. Elhanan told his friend he was crazy to visit to his home at such a time and ask him to come and meet some Palestinians.

But eventually he went, and he met people like Mazen Faraj, a Palestinian whose father had been killed by Israeli soldiers as he walked home from the market carrying a sack of groceries that the soldiers assumed to be something else.

As they listened to one another’s horrific stories, they began to realize that they were all suffering from the same thing—the profoundly human experience of grief and pain. They realized that both Israeli and Palestinian blood runs red both in the veins and on the ground, and all bitter tears are salty and borne of raw grief, and that they could either continue to use their suffering as a reason to promote violence or as the fuel to promote a passion for peace and a stop to the world’s murderous ways of hatred and fear.

And so they worked together to show the world a picture of reconciliation and to demonstrate the courage it takes to preach peace and proclaim the kinship of all people in the hope of stopping the cycle of violence. Elhanan and Faraj, who now call one another brother, have traveled around the world together to tell their stories to anyone who will listen.

For me, this was their most profound story: Elhanan described it thus: “[A]fter one of the worst days, which was especially bloody, we decided to use an unusual tactic to touch peoples’ hearts. We

invited our brothers and sisters, members of Palestinian bereaved families, to [the Israeli Red Cross] in Jerusalem to donate blood for Israeli victims.

We, on the other hand, slipped across the enemy lines and reached the hospital in Ramallah where we donated blood for Palestinian victims.”

The Israelis donated blood for wounded Palestinians, and the Palestinians donated blood for wounded Israelis. They wanted to heal the holes in their hearts left by the senseless killing of their family members. So they gave their blood for each other. Reconciliation was the only way forward for them.

I don't know what Israelis and Palestinians think about the Holy Spirit, breath of life and comforter as well as disturber and midwife of change, but listening to Elhanan's story, I cannot help but see the Spirit at work, requiring and enabling hope and reconciliation and self-giving love in the face of seemingly endless violence.