

Come and feel
the cold of sitting
on a cardboard mat
in the wee hours of the
morning,
the daily humiliation
of metal detectors,
permits accepted or
denied,
identity cards
with worn out black
strips.

Don't turn away from
pants slipping down
as belts are removed.

Feel the glory, O Israel
your people enslaved
in a matrix of control
at best
at worst
a systematic daily strip
search
of human rights.

Don't turn away from
the sound bomb going off
the tear gas discharging
rubber bullets flying

Feel the pain, O
Christians
Jesus in the garden
praying for deliverance---
the cup to pass
the strength to continue
the journey

Don't turn away
stay awake, stay awake

See the glory, faith
delegations
the extreme patience,
even good humor
at this prolonged dark
hour,
65 years of grinding
humiliation
waiting for an end---
the right to return home
stay in your home
build a new home

Come faithful ones
get on your knees
and pray with Christ at
the Checkpoint
pray with the ones
touching their heads to
the ground,
pray for forgiveness---
for your sins of omission,
commission and
indifference
pray for the glory to
come
to catch even a glimpse
now

Advent 1: Become an Insomniac

Mark 13:24-37

"Be aware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come...Therefore, keep awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at the cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he suddenly comes." (Mark 13: 33 and 37)

Jesus calls us again to stay awake, to keep watch, for he is always coming and in danger. This is our most important task as disciples---to stay awake and be watchful. We are called to watch for conformity between our words and our deeds, to honor the divine in each other, to seek it and protect it. We are also called to watch for the ways that Jesus' coming can be thwarted, obscured, or denied and to do something about it.

As I think back over my time as an Ecumenical Accompanier, I realize this too was what I was called to do---to watch, keep alert, and when necessary intervene. We were called to "keep a protective presence." Nowhere was this more important than in my weekly duty to rise with one of my fellow accompaniers in the early morning and go to the Bethlehem Check Point and monitor the deliberately slow and inhumane processing of Palestinians crossing to go to work in Jerusalem. In addition to monitoring and reporting, we also met with faith delegations so they could experience the dehumanizing aspects of the occupation up close ----something they could easily miss from a bus window or skating through the humanitarian line.

By the time we arrived at 3:30 AM, there were already a few hundred huddled together against the cold waiting for the gate to open at 4:00 so they might get to work by 6:30 or 7:00. The 8-mile distance between Bethlehem and Jerusalem could take up to two hours.

Besides counting and sending our reports to the United Nations, we also monitored the Jerusalem side of the checkpoint to make sure the metal detectors were operating and keep track of the flow of people waiting or passing. I spent many a cold morning on this side nodding or saying Maraban (Welcome) or Sabah el Kheer (Good Morning). Often I sat

under or near a poster that pictured Jesus at Gethsemane. It was an advertisement calling us to "Come and Feel the Glory." One morning I jotted down the following poem. It speaks to this call to wake up.

Prayer

Human One, advent our lives. Help us keep awake, alert, uneasy, and alive. In these dark and uncertain times, help us to greet the dawn and each other as if all were you. Help us keep faith with your purpose for a new world based on just relationships. Let it begin with us. Amen.

To learn more about Bethlehem visit these websites:

www.openbethlehem.org

<http://littletownofbethlehem.org/> for information about documentary Little Town of Bethlehem

To learn more about the wall and checkpoints visit:

www.B'tselem.org or www.amnestyinternational.org

Contact Rev. Loren McGrail for preaching, speaking, and teaching on eye-witness experience in Palestine and Israel. Her email is lorenmcgrail@gmail.com or blog <http://agamentofdestiny.blogspot.com/>

