

THEOLOGY OF PILGRIMAGE



Listening to the Living Stones
Towards Theological Explorations of Kairos Pilgrimages for Justice

“Abridged Version”

All rights reserved ©
Alternative Tourism Group- Study Center
2016

Alternative Tourism Group - Study Center
Beit Sahour, 74 Star Street, P.O.Box 173, Palestine
Tel: +970 2 277 2151- Fax: +970 2 277 2211
Email: info@atg.ps - Website: www.atg.ps

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Listening to Living Stones	6
I: Context of Pilgrimage in Holy Land	8
• Defining Pilgrimage	8
• Context of Palestine and Pilgrimage	8
• Kairos Document	10
• Kairos Palestine in the Context of Pilgrimage	12
II: Perspectives on Pilgrimage	13
• Early Christian Perspective	14
• Constantine Christianity's Perspective	14
• Medieval Perspective	15
• Luther's View	15
• Calvin's View	15
• Catholic Perspective	16
• Orthodox Perspective	16
• Ecumenical Perspective	16
• Evangelical Perspective	17
III: A theology of Pilgrimage	18
• God as Co-Companion in the Pilgrimage	18
• God as a Shepherd: Walking Along With	19
• Towards a Pilgrim-Imaging Christology the Sheep	19
• Pilgrimage as Sacrament	19
IV: Pilgrimage in Today's Context	20
• Pilgrimage as Solidarity with Living Stones	20
• Pilgrimage as Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus Christ	21
• Pilgrimage is Locating God Among the Living Stones	23
• Pilgrimage is Listening to Living Stones and Transforming Pilgrim's Lives	24
V: Towards a Kairos Pilgrimage	25
• Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for a Discipleship of Cross for the Pilgrims	26
• Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Redeeming and Recovering the Zionised Biblical Texts and Interpretations	26
• Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Living Testimonies from Transformed Communities	26
• Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Advocacy and Solidarity Pilgrims	27
Conclusion	28

Introduction

The Alternative Tourism Group (ATG) is pleased to publish this shortened version of the booklet, "Listening to the Living Stones - Towards theological explorations of Kairos Pilgrimages for justice." It is a booklet for pilgrims who visit the Holy Land with intent to "Come and See" the reality of the harsh reality of the situation in the Holy Land, especially as it affects the Palestinian people.

ATG views a pilgrimage to the Holy Land as something beyond a sentimental and self-indulgent travel. It believes that a pilgrim should, of necessity, view the visit as a theater of opportunity for solidarity and a quest for spirituality through she/he is able to discern God's truth and call to justice.

This booklet is primarily directed at pilgrims with a religious background, notably theologians and church leaders. It sets out a theological framework within which Palestinians would like church leaders and theological educators and thinkers from around the world to view the Holy Land and their pilgrimage. It is an invitation to break their silence about the occupation, heighten the levels of solidarity between religious leaders and theologians from outside the region and Palestinians and, thus, accelerate the pursuit of freedom for Palestine through justice-oriented encounters.

The booklet is a short-read and offers a glimpse of an even more detailed study of the original study carried by Rev Raj Bharath Patta whose book was a call "to listen to the Living Stones". Patta's was a theological reflection which spelled out the ethical and theological imperatives for a Just Peace, also to the ecumenical imperative for unity in action. Those who wish to know and explore the subject further are invited to engage in a full reading of our study by accessing a copy of the book from our offices.

Prior to the publication of this theological interrogation, ATG had published the booklet "Come and see", a call from Palestinian Christians

which contained guidelines for Christians contemplating a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. ATG offers other important studies and reports it has published, all of which are related to the process we call “Pilgrimages for Transformation”.

We hope readers of this booklet will find in it materials that tease their appetite to explore the subject in greater depth and join ATG in its effort to further investigate Biblical insights, and theological reflections on what pilgrimage truly implies in the context of the Holy Land.

We are grateful to Philip Mathew, Bangalore India, long time ecumenist whose vast experience with the ecumenical movement as editor and writer in ecumenical journals for carrying out this succinct synopsis. We are reminded that all this began when Rev. Raj Bharath Patta carried out his original research. Between when we published his version and now, we see how much curiosity it has created among pilgrims and those seeking a spiritual experience that is rooted in the political narrative of the Holy Land. It is now emerged as an important arena for further study and research.

We hope readers of this booklet will find in it materials that tease their appetite to explore the subject in greater depth and join ATG in its effort to further investigate Biblical insights, and theological reflections on what pilgrimage truly implies in the context of the Holy Land.

Rami Kassis

Executive Director
Alternative Tourism Group

Listening to Living Stones

Towards a Theological Exploration of Kairos

Pilgrimages for Justice

Pilgrimages are as old as the religions themselves, and have given a sense of self-edification and self-enrichment to pilgrims belonging to all religions.

Over the years, there has been a growing interest for people to travel to Palestine and Israel on pilgrimages. It has changed pilgrimage tourism a major industry and now translates into mere tourism with all its appendages. Thousands of pilgrims, people of faith and scholars from around the world come to take in the sights the historical sites; and other accompanying attractions. For most part, these are touristic-type ventures.

However, to most pilgrims the narrative that they hear in the land of the holy is those of Israeli tour operators, who take the tourists/pilgrims only to the sites in Israel. In the name of security, the tour operators startle the pilgrims with accounts of risks in Palestine that prompt them not to visit the sites in Palestine.

Palestinians ask: "Did many pilgrims even know that there are Palestinian Arab Christians in this part of the world? Have we ever acknowledged their Christian experience which has the strength to strengthen the faith of pilgrims who want to walk on the foot-steps of Jesus Christ? Are we aware that we in Palestine have a narrative to share about the Biblical sites on our land"?

In such a context, the need emerges for an alternative tourism that must try to explore what pilgrimage means for faith communities in our times. There has never been an opportunity for the pilgrims to Holy Land to listen to the experiences of the living stones, the local Palestinian communities, their narratives, their faith experiences, their stories and their lives for reasons known and unknown. Therefore,

alternative pilgrimage is envisaged to listen to the unheard voices of the living stones. Here is an attempt to decipher that alternative pilgrimage - justice pilgrimage - which is a creative response to the changing signs of our times.

This booklet is meant for the Christian faith communities who embark on a pilgrimage to Palestine Israel to be sensitive to the living stones, and therefore provides a glimpse of the political context of Palestine Israel, a context of Kairos Palestine, and an attempt to bring out the theological contours in understanding justice pilgrimage.

Historical and Biblical perspectives on pilgrimages are discussed here, and an attempt on the theology of pilgrimage has been made here with God as a co-companion in our pilgrimage. The relevance of such pilgrimages is also discussed here. This booklet is not an end in itself, but only a starting point, a beginning to unravel justice pilgrimage, with the lone focus on pilgrims finding avenues to encounter the living God by engaging with the 'living stones'.



I

Context of Pilgrimage in Holy Land

Defining Pilgrimage

Irrespective of religious affirmations, people from time immemorial have set out on journeys characterizing them as pilgrimages, with varying motives. The word 'pilgrim' comes from the Latin legal word 'pelegrinus' meaning, a 'stateless person' or a person without a country. It has a connotation of one who 'journey between states'.

The purpose of any pilgrimage has been to express that they have arrived near the Lord God, as many Christian pilgrims believe it is in the Holy Land.

People want to express their social piety by going on a pilgrimage and in due course seek an intersection of human life and the divine life at a particular place, which they assume is available and present at holy places.

One has to also notice that pilgrimages are as old as religions themselves, and therefore, with the growth of the religions, pilgrimage sites have also been increased in leaps and bounds.

Context of Palestine and Pilgrimage

Palestine is a unique faith tourism destination - its long history, religious significance and natural beauty make it an amazing place to visit. Palestine's importance derives partly from the fact that it is home to the three monotheistic and Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Every year it attracts many pilgrims, people of faith and scholars who visit the holy places.

Palestine is a unique faith tourism destination - its long history, religious significance and natural beauty make it an amazing place to visit.



Secular tourists come to explore the historical sites, Palestine's vibrant cities, rural life and natural reserves.

However, since the beginning of the 20th century, Palestine has seen complex political and historical turmoil. This included the creation of Israel in 1948, and the 1967 war. As a result of the latter, Israel occupied the West bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza strip. These events have resulted in catastrophic political, economic and social calamity for the Palestinians. They must now live in conditions of submission to the occupier, and a majority have ended up becoming refugees.

In a sense, it can be said that Palestine itself was simply wiped off the map, and historic Palestine became known as Israel. In this context, tourism turned into a political tool in the supremacy and domination of the Israeli establishment over land and people, and an instrument for preventing the Palestinians from enjoying the benefits of the fruits of the cultural and human interaction on which tourism thrives.

Despite all this, the touristic and historic sites, and holy places found in Israel and Palestinian territories are united. They cannot be separated from each other. So, it is important to visit both Israel and Palestine, rather than choose to visit just one over the other. This is the way towards more fairness and justice.

Kairos Document

The Kairos document is an affirmation of faith around which courage is constructed, fear is released, and steadfastness is imbibed. It calls for partners-in-faith, partners-for-justice, and partners-in-liberation. Kairos says to the world, “Come and see.”

The Kairos document outlines a desire that the Churches around the world can be received as pilgrims, “visiting us to pray, and to try to take back a message of peace, justice, love and reconciliation.” Palestinian Christians have prepared the guidelines for visionary pilgrims and visitors who seek authentic, face-to-face human encounters in the Holy Land, and who wish to connect with the Palestinian Christians, the “Living Stones” and who share their faith. In this context, the invitation is to be ‘Transformational pilgrims’ seeking to make a positive difference in the lives of the Palestinians. Meeting Palestinians who are living under occupation will be an act of solidarity that brings hope, and contributes to the economic development.

Palestinians have now developed compelling and unique tour itineraries and programmes for visitors and pilgrims with the ultimate goal of “promoting peace with justice for the people in the Holy Land.” Palestinians are particularly conscious of the tendency in the West to attach biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of their rights. It is for this reason that Christians are urged to engage in a ‘pilgrimage less taken’ that opens up experiences which prompt a deeper and different kind of reflection of the Word of God. It will, hopefully, rectify their current assumptions and interpretations and enable them to discern the Word of God as a source of life for all peoples.

Palestinian Christians often bemoan the fact that Churches have done a grave disservice to their flock by ignoring the plight of millions of dispossessed Palestinians. As Christians living in the Holy Land, they remain convinced that when their Christian sisters and brothers from around the world gain access to a more inclusive picture of their reality,

they will no longer be able to ignore their cry for peace with justice.

With this background, some come to the Holy Land as spectators, touring holy sites, as they would tour museums, not caring or realizing that for Palestinian Christians these are living places of worship. They miss out on the true essence of pilgrimage. Reflecting the pious practices of the Pharisees, they search for a personal blessing, seeking to renew an egocentric, individualistic faith. What they choose to see and do only reinforces their prejudices, preconceived notions, and limited understandings of a complex situation. Yet, true faith requires more from a Christian than purveying stereotypes and untruths and supporting injustice.

The genuine Christian pilgrim seeks the living Christ in the here and now, in solidarity with the oppressed, the poor, and the imprisoned. They look for truth and seek justice, supporting and blessing both Palestinian and Israeli peacemakers. Hence, a Christian pilgrimage must be one to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

The Living Stones are, in fact, the keepers of the sacred traditions of the Holy Land. For decades, millions of Christians have journeyed to the Holy Land and returned home without even realizing that their pilgrimage was missing something very important - face-to-face human encounters with those who share their faith. Palestinian Christians' continuous presence for more than 2,000 years in the land of Christ's life, death, and resurrection gives them a unique connection to Christianity and its traditions. They also share, along with the rest of the Arab world, a culture of hospitality renowned for its warmth and generosity. In addition, Palestinian Christians have a history of welcoming pilgrims to their land, continuing a tradition their ancestors began centuries ago.

As Christians living in the Holy Land, they remain convinced that when their Christian sisters and brothers from around the world gain access to a more inclusive picture of their reality, they will no longer be able to ignore their cry for peace with justice.

As hosts, the Palestinian Christians are able to show visitors holy sites rarely seen by ordinary tourists and can illuminate these sites with a faith that is physically linked to these places. For Palestinian Christians, the holy sites are not mere tourist destinations - they are often their own local Churches - places that have meaning in their every day worship. The people in these communities - the "Living Stones" - are keepers of sacred traditions in the Holy Land and protectors of the places that mark events in the life of Christ and the prophets.

Kairos Palestine in the Context of Pilgrimage

Situating Kairos Palestine in the context of pilgrimage is an opportunity for visitors, tourists and pilgrims, who come to the Holy Land to listen to the voices of the living stones rather than merely visiting the sites; or indulge in superficial spirituality that pretends that it is in touch with and in pursuance of the pathways that Jesus once took.

The call given by the Church leaders of Palestine is to engage with the harsh realities of the occupation, the realities of ecological imbalances that are being created, the realities of forced migration, the realities of check points, the realities of the Palestinians being denied access to Jerusalem, and to invite the pilgrims to have a real life changing experience reflecting on how Jesus, who was born and lived here, would have addressed these critical realities in these times. Kairos Palestine offers pilgrims an invitation to understand pilgrimage as a journey from despair to hope, a journey from wilderness to the promised-land, by locating faith and spirituality in the realities and aspirations for new hope and new life of Palestinians. Its call is to be in solidarity in ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and all forms of discrimination as the solution that will lead to a just and lasting peace.

II Perspectives on Pilgrimage

It was not until the 4th century, when Christianity became a state religion, and pilgrimage to Holy Land assumed more importance and attention. Prior to that, there were some monks and people who went to the Holy Land on pilgrimages. They went as part of their vow to travel as pilgrims and to locate and know the Biblical sites for themselves. The New Testament (NT) community was heavily influenced by the heavenly Jerusalem, and paid little attention to the geography called Jerusalem of their times, and therefore we find no specific pilgrimages made by the NT community visiting the holy sites, where Jesus walked or performed miracles. Nor we do have a record of the Pauline community on a pilgrimage, venerating the holy sites.

Though, Pilgrimage is a post New Testament innovation, one can read and re-read the moorings of pilgrimage in the Bible, for there is enough resource in the Scriptures. However for want of space, here is a brief glimpse of some random perspectives for a deeper understanding on pilgrimage.





Early Christian Perspective

For the early Christians, the resurrected Jesus Christ was the center of their faith, and Jerusalem was not a focal point of their faith. This has been the driving force upon which the early Christians and Churches built their understanding of God. Historically, there was a fall of Jerusalem in 70 Common Era (CE), and then it fell under the siege of the Roman Empire, and the early Jewish Christians fled from the city. Gregory of Nyssa commenting on pilgrimage questions the whole theology of omnipresence of God, and expresses surprise that God and Holy Spirit cannot be confined to a particular geography or place, for God is present beyond all human imaginations and understandings. Therefore there was no special status or treatment given to Jerusalem in the first three centuries of the Christian Church.

Constantine Christianity's Perspective

After 324 CE, Emperor Constantine took control of the Roman Empire, and Christianity became a state religion. In order to unite Christians and promote Christian faith in the empire, bringing back

the glory of Jerusalem as the central space of faith was imminent and a necessity for him. Jerusalem attained a special status of holy city, and that made Jerusalem a favorite destiny in the pilgrimage, and Jerusalem from then on became an important geography in the Christian consciousness. This is a shift of gear in the perspective on Jerusalem, for only from the 4th Century Jerusalem began to enjoy this special privilege of being a 'holy city.'

Medieval Perspective

Medieval Christianity brought in new explorations into the very understanding of the pilgrimage for there were several criticisms against holiness ascribed to a particular place. These challenged believers to examine how relevant it is to seek God at one place when God is present everywhere.

Luther's View

Martin Luther, the Protestant theologian of the Reformation had strong views on pilgrimage. There has been harsh criticism against pilgrimage by Protestant Christianity, because of widespread understanding that by going on a pilgrimage to holy places and important places like Rome, individuals would be saved. Protestant Christian theologians contested such ideas from those days and hotly challenged the practice of pilgrimage. However, for Luther the valid reason for people going on pilgrimage was, 'a man motivated by a singular devotion for the honor of the saints, the glory of God and his edification'. Luther stressed that God was everywhere and no one must confine the location of God to particular places and spaces.

Calvin's View

Calvin sings an almost similar chorus as Luther in critiquing the practice of pilgrimage in his times. He extends the discussion on pilgrimages from where Luther has left and offers significant critique. He goes beyond Luther in suggesting that the Scriptural text such as John 4:21 actually

prohibit pilgrimage. Pilgrimage to sites where relics of Christ and the saints are on display has an inbuilt tendency to deflect attention away from the places where God has chosen to make himself known and available to us - most notably in the Word and sacraments – and onto lesser things.

Catholic Perspective

For the Catholics, pilgrimages are very important as they provide an opportunity to tread on the footprints of the saints and the Holy One in Holy Land particularly, and therefore any visit to the shrine of spiritual importance brings blessing to the pilgrims. This has been the driving force for the huge inflow of pilgrims to different shrines across the world. Though Rome and Jerusalem would be two major pilgrim sites for them, the Catholic world encourages going on a pilgrimage to various shrines of historical and spiritual significance.

Orthodox Perspective

The Orthodox Church has, from its inception, pilgrimage as one of its faith tenants and has been encouraging its members to go on a pilgrimage in meeting one of their saints at a distant place. Therefore over the years there have been several places of high importance for the Orthodox Christians named after a saint, with lots of happenings of healings and miracles at those pilgrim spots. According to the Orthodox perspectives, there is a rich theological understanding on pilgrimage, for the pilgrim is called to have a transformational process internally as one engages on a journey in search of the divine.

Ecumenical Perspective

Pilgrimage was understood to encounter the local people and listening to their stories and thereby recognizes Jesus as on the way to Emmaus. This strand of thinking on pilgrimage comes to the fore by replacing geography with sociology, where knowing the people in the given context takes the utmost priority.



Evangelical Perspective

Tourism is used by evangelical pilgrims to promote their ideology in Israel. Second, marginal political groups from Israel use tourism as a political tool to promote their ideology. There has been a huge inflow of pilgrims from across the world from Evangelical groups travelling to the Holy Land to see the fulfillment of the gospel in that land and to eulogize and evangelize the people in the Holy Land towards Christian faith. Promotion of their ideology of converting people has been one of their driving forces in making pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

III

A Theology of Pilgrimage

A theology of Pilgrimage is important, because every Christian needs to critically think out the need and the approach for a pilgrimage, for only then can a pilgrim's visit to Palestine be meaningful and challenging.

More, it is a biblical, theological and a contextual necessity. It is a biblical, theological and a contextual necessity. A theology of pilgrimage would strengthen the theological spectrum, for it would become a lens of operating, viewing, responding and understanding the Bible from a near-totally different perspective. The Bible has been used in and out by Christian Zionist groups to defend occupation, and therefore a theology of pilgrimage would help the pilgrim to critically analyze the Biblical and the present context of Palestine Israel, and would help to recover texts that have been used against the people in Palestine.

Theological exploration is challenge most relevant to our times today

God as Co-Companion in the Pilgrimage

God began his pilgrimage as a co-companion with 'creation'. God made God's own road as the creation came into order and moved along as God walked. Creation is the handiwork of God, the co-companion who carefully crafted and designed the creation according to God's own taste.

Wandering pilgrims were the people of God. When Egyptians were treated harshly, where there was oppression, occupation, discrimination, hard task masters, God as a pilgrimaging accompanier heard their cries, saw their affliction, toil and oppression and came in to rescue them people from and out of their bondage with terrifying signs and wonders so they regained their land. God as a pilgrim is not on a self-gratifying/ self-centric journey, but comes on a journey for justice and peace.

God as a Shepherd: Walking Along with the Sheep

God as a pilgrimaging Shepherd walks along with the co-pilgrims, leads them to explore the riches of the land and people in that given context, protects them, directs them, nourishes them and guides them to realize the realities of the ground in which they pass by. The Johannine Jesus is understood as the 'good shepherd,' who has come to give life, life in all its fullness. In the context of pilgrimage, God walks along with the pilgrims like that of a shepherd to guard, guide, protect, share, feed and lead.

Towards a Pilgrim-Imaging Christology

The Pilgrimaging God sends God's son as a Pilgrim into the world to identify with other co-pilgrims. The word became flesh and pitched its tent among the other flesh. Jesus was always on a pilgrimage. As an infant he fled as a refugee to Egypt from Bethlehem, and returned to Nazareth. His pilgrimage brought healing and condemned injustice and proclaimed liberation.

Jesus journeyed as a pilgrim, as a sojourner and the writer Luke provides a clue in the journey of Jesus to understand pilgrimage in the New Testament, for Jesus knew what it means to be a pilgrim and what it means to go on a pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage as Sacrament

One of the theological arguments in understanding pilgrimage in the contemporary society is the encountering of Christ in the sacrament of Eucharist. Therefore, pilgrimage is understood as "the Sacrament of geography," where the people, the place and the past, tribe and terrain and time-story are very important to hold on.

IV

Pilgrimage in Today's Context

We need to discuss the implications of a theology for our times, situations and people, so that we can become sensitive in overcoming the populist ways of doing pilgrimage and take up a much serious role in listening to the living stones, who have been unheard and unrecognised. These implications are not an exhaustive one, but are some pointers and directives in moving forward.

Pilgrimage as Solidarity with Living Stones

The biblical verse that the popular tour operators choose as their invocation caption is from Matthew 22: 14, to draw the attention of people to come and join a pilgrimage. This particular verse is drawn from the parable Jesus narrated about a wedding banquet. For, at the banquet, the king invites his guests to attend and when the hour for them to attend the wedding banquet has come, each of them brought forward their excuses why they could not attend the banquet. Infuriated by their absence, the king killed them and asked his slaves to invite everyone they found on the streets. When the banquet began, the king found one person without the wedding robe, and punished him for attending the banquet in that condition. The gospel writer marks this verse as crucial and points out how “many are called, but few are chosen.” The intention of the gospel writer about the parable is to convey that many were ‘invited’, and all those had an excuse and could not attend the banquet. Those originally uninvited were then called to attend the banquet from the streets and thus became chosen. So ‘chosenness’ is a surprise package, for the uninvited ultimately become the chosen, and even if the invited chose to come and attend, they wouldn’t have got the wedding robe and would have been punished. So, many are called but few are chosen.

Now, in the context of the pilgrimage and in the context of an invitation to Christians to join on a Holy Land tour, this question must be answered: Why did this biblical verse interest the tour operators in appealing to

the customers? In his world view, the tour operator would have thought many are invited to be Christians, but few become chosen if they travel to the land, where Jesus Christ walked and lived. So the tour operator on the one hand attributes chosen-ness to those who travel on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and on the other hand links the chosen-ness to the people of Israel in that Holy Land. To further stretch the discussion, according to popular pilgrimages, chosen-ness comes along with the pilgrimage and therefore the choice is on the Christians to choose if they want to be chosen people, by making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Otherwise, they remain as mere invitees.

It is not merely by going on a pilgrimage that a person ends up being the chosen one. Nor does a pilgrimage to the land of the chosen ones make someone a chosen person. One becomes chosen by responding to the invitation to come, see, and partake in the banquet, though they happen to be non-invitees.

Pilgrimage as Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus Christ

The experience of popular tour operators in question was that, 'they found themselves' as they visited this Holy Land. Also, such an experience has taught them to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Indeed pilgrimage is walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. But it is not sufficient to merely walk on the sites of Jerusalem or Nazareth. The question is: What does walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ mean today?

We, as pilgrims and tourists are distanced by a time period of nearly two thousand years from where Jesus Christ lived and walked. How do we then perceive what it means to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ? Is it merely walking on the so called sites where Jesus walked and performed some miracles? Does walking on the footsteps of Jesus Christ mean just walking where Jesus was believed to have walked and lived? How do we theologically discern walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ today?

Take the case study of one particular site, which is believed to be one where Jesus walked on. From there, it is helpful to posit how we recognize the imprints of Jesus path in such a place. The place of Crucifixion of Jesus, the Calvary, outside of the Jerusalem is a prospect at hand. On travelling to that site, one can see not just one place of crucifixion. Rather there are three places each established by different Church traditions and denominations. There is a cave that connotes the spot. And under that cave, one is witnessed to see one more place, where a Cross was found by the mother of Emperor Constantine, and that site is further venerated. On reading the Scriptures, one imagines that after the trial Jesus had a long and suffering journey of carrying the Cross and was crucified outside the city. But today one is perplexed to see the contradictions and counter claims in depicting the holy site among the Christian believers. It begs the question: Merely walking around those three places of beliefs of crucifixion is not consonant with walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ? Such an empty walk around those sites is mere religiosity with the value of spirituality is diminished and/or obscured. How then shall we understand the notion of walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ?

- Pilgrimage as walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ can be better understood in the words of Jesus: 'If anyone wants to follow me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.' In the context of pilgrimage in the Holy Land, it is not merely walking on the sites where Jesus was supposed to have walked. Rather, it is to take up one's cross, the cross of identifying with the suffering under the occupation today, deny all our luxuries of superiority complexes, and then find Jesus among those occupied communities and then to follow Jesus Christ. Therefore pilgrimage in the context of occupation in Holy Land is to walk along with those suffering communities, who are living under bondage, fear, and under constant threat to live a life of dignity.
- Pilgrimage as walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, can also be understood in the prophecy of Micah, when he summoned people with the question: 'And what does God requires of you? To do justice,

to have mercy, to walk humbly with God.' In the context of illegal occupation of land by the oppressive powers, God certainly requires of us to do justice for there has been lots of injustice surmounting in the land of the holy one, and that can be possible by proclaiming the year of the Lord, by releasing the captives and working to set free the oppressed to liberty. It also implies to have mercy for Palestinians; the original inhabitants of that land of the holy one, for there have been merciless killings and attacks on those that ask for justice. To walk humbly with God is to walk with those suffering communities, for God is willing to walk with them in their quest for justice.

Pilgrimage is Locating God Among the Living Stones

Many popular tour operators opine that 'life is incomplete if one doesn't visit Holy Land'. This is deviant and deceptive rhetoric. It is a poignant reminder of commercial tactics now employed to attract the tourists. How does life render itself incomplete by not visiting the Holy Land? Travel to the Holy Land today is a very middle class, bourgeoisie affair. Only the upper middle class and those that can afford it get to travel to the so called 'Holy Land.' What about those that cannot afford to travel because of their poor economical status and situation? Will every one of them have led incomplete lives only because they could not undertake that travel to the Holy Land? In pilgrimage one needs to demystify this very understanding, for pilgrimage is not a compulsory religious mandate for the Christian faith like in the case of other faiths. It is only optional. There, too, the goal of any pilgrimage is to seek God in the journey, and that is possible only when that traveler is conscientized about the local context and seeks to explore God among the 'living stones,' the local people rather than in the remnants of dead stones in the sites there.

Pilgrimage is Listening to Living Stones and Transforming Pilgrim's Lives

Indeed, pilgrimage should be a life changing spiritual journey, but unfortunately it is only made as a 'feel good' trip to visit the sites of where Jesus lived and walked. Every pilgrim has to take into consideration the reality of the situation in the Holy Land. Why are there walls as walls of division in the Holy Land? Why does a dominant Israel use the name of religion, scripture and God to occupy the land of Palestinians and accumulate blood on their hands? What are the predicaments and pains of the Palestinians in their own land? These are some of the questions one needs to ask oneself as one visits the Holy Land. Jerusalem is not Disney Land or any other favourite holiday spot. Travelling on a pilgrimage is not a absolute holiday.

Every pilgrim has to take into consideration the reality of the situation in the Holy Land.



V

Towards a Kairos Pilgrimage

Kairos Pilgrimage calls for listening theologies, listening churches and listening pilgrims

Faith and theology today needs to be more missional in its approach, more strategic in its direction and more practical in its applications, for the goal of having faith in Jesus Christ is to promote life, life in all its fullness. The context today is in need of theologies, churches and pilgrims that listen to the cries of living local communities, communicating the language of the people on the margins rather than theologies that are abstract and vacant of authentic content. "Faith comes from hearing" (Rom 10:17). Theologies that hear and listen can critically articulate faith in a particular context, and therefore a Kairos pilgrimage theology calls on the pilgrims to be listening pilgrims, listening to the cries of the living stones. Listening will drive towards action and praxis, and by that theology becomes action-oriented and lively.

Pilgrims are obliged must engage in conversations with the local living stones, willing to receive their hospitality and be open to get challenged from their local life narratives. Listening to living stones will provide a space to listening to alternative narratives of the Holy Land from the Palestinian people, and shall provide opportunities to listen and understand the local Palestinian Christians experiences and stories of life. The call, therefore, for a pilgrim is to be a listening pilgrim, be an advocating pilgrim, an action / activist pilgrim, and make the best utility and understanding of pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for a Discipleship of Cross for the Pilgrims

The call is to look for God among the living realities of the people of Palestine, who have been under the rubric of the Cross of occupation, crucified and longing for an experience of resurrection of new life. Following Jesus Christ today is to deny oneself, taking up the challenges of crosses in Palestine and striving for their liberation.

Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Redeeming and Recovering the Zionised Biblical Texts and Interpretations

Christian Zionism has conveniently taken deep root in most of our theologies, hermeneutics and churches today, which has called the Christians to take for granted that the biblical Israel is today's political Israel and therefore there is a divine sanction for them in occupying the land in Palestine. However, Kairos Pilgrimage provides us an opportunity to redeem and recover the Biblical narratives from the occupier's territory and to redeem it from the occupier's perspective by re-appropriating it to the given context of the imprisoned Palestinians, who are today's biblical Israel, forced into slavery and occupation.

The Kairos call to 'come and see' is an invitation to overcome the prejudices about Palestinians and to engage in deeper conversations with the local communities.

Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Living Testimonies from Transformed Communities

Having come to the Holy Land for pilgrimage, the challenge is not to feel self-satisfied with the visit. Rather, it is in engaging with the living stones one can encounter the living God, and then go back to one's own place to testify for the encountering of God by advocating for justice to Palestinians.

Naeem Ateek, the Palestinian theologian explains that, "holiness is not in a place but in a person called Jesus Christ. There have been 'selective pilgrimages'

by different faith communities that come to Palestine Israel.” According to Ateek, pilgrims from the Orthodox spirituality background, who come during Easter, Passion Week feel that “being physically near to the place brings them a blessing. For Protestants, Bible is more important than the place of the land. Most Catholics want to go to Nazareth, to the place of Mother Mary. Therefore, each pilgrim comes with some motives and notions on their visit to the land here.” He further says that, “the pilgrims are to look for the importance of the person in the place and search for the living testimonies that emerge of these places.” He then challenges the pilgrims, by saying, “You run where Jesus walked”. Pilgrimage according to him is to spend time with the local faith communities, the living stones, striking a balance between the person and the place of the land.

Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Advocacy and Solidarity Pilgrims

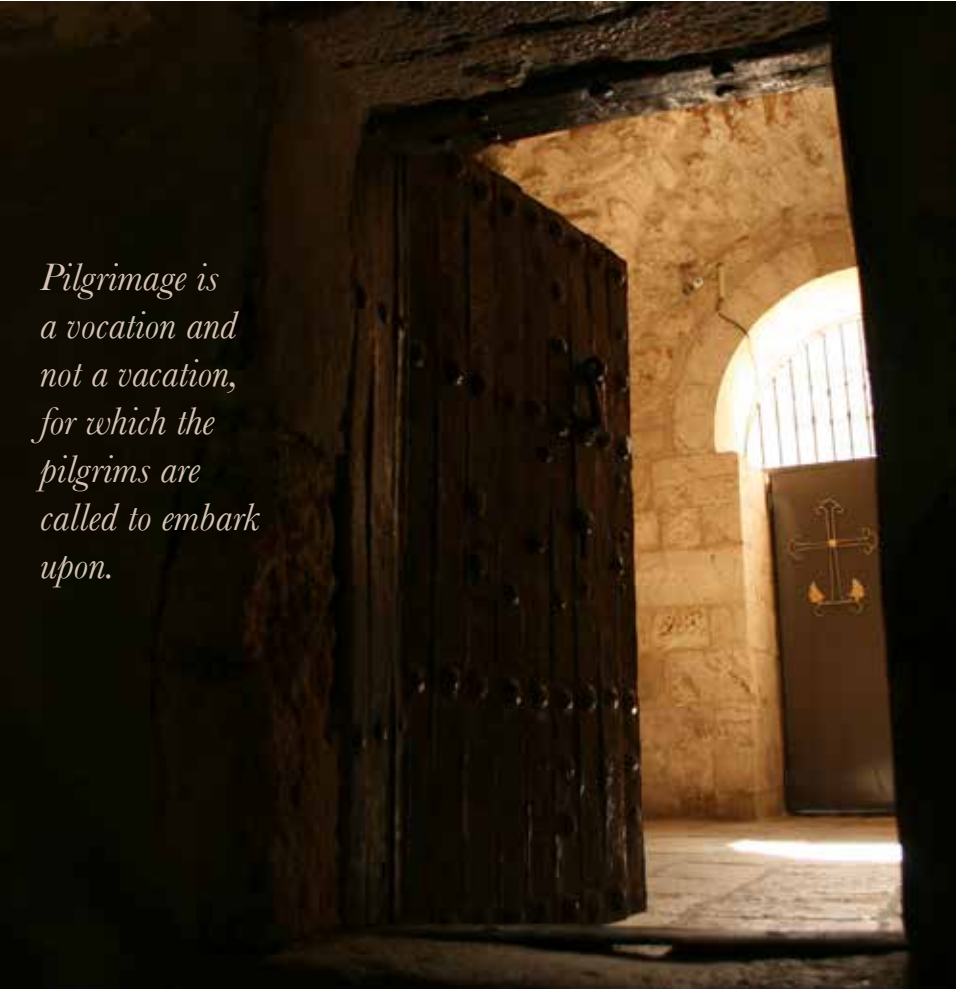
As transformed pilgrims, the pilgrimage should inspire the pilgrims to partake in global solidarity campaigns for justice to Palestine. The call is to organise forums in support of justice to Palestine, sensitise the local communities, join with other responsible civil society partners in garnering support for Palestine, and lobby with the government authorities for justice to Palestinians. The transformed pilgrim has firsthand information about the realities in Palestine, and therefore needs to be the first one to advocate for justice to Palestinians.

The call is to be prophetic in our faith, address the human rights violations done to the people under occupation, speak to the principalities and powers of occupation by joining in movements like Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), academic boycott movements and to express our dissent with the occupation.

The call is also to join the global advocacy like observing World Week of Prayer for Peace in Palestine Israel, imploring on the government officials of our own countries to address this global human rights violations and make known to the world about the unjust practices of the occupiers. The call is to build movements of global solidarity for the release of people who are profiled and imprisoned on false charges of sedition, and strive for their release.

Conclusion

Pilgrimage is a vocation and not a vacation, for which the pilgrims are called to embark upon. In the backdrop of many popular pilgrimages being conducted in the land of the holy one, alternative pilgrimage or justice pilgrimage is a creative response in discerning the signs of our times critically. These pilgrimages are the need of the hour as we are challenged to listen to the unheard stories of the living stones, the local Palestine people, their narratives, their faith experiences and their cries for justice and life.



*Pilgrimage is
a vocation and
not a vacation,
for which the
pilgrims are
called to embark
upon.*