

## PARTNERPLAN

# John McCulloch - Israel March 2020

c/o St Andrew's Scottish Guest House  
PO Box 8619  
1 David Remez Street  
Jerusalem 91086  
Israel

### Embodying Justice A visit to Rabbis for Human Rights Israel



A few days before Covid-19 brought lock-down to Bethlehem and the West Bank, I had the privilege of meeting again with Rabbis for Human Rights (PHR), a long-standing partner of the Church of Scotland here. Sitting in their small offices in Jerusalem, with the aroma of black coffee in the air, we sat and discussed how at the heart of Judaism & Christianity is the call to embody justice. We shared of how easy it is to fall into despair, when you reflect on the world around us, and yet, as people of faith, how we must hold on to hope. It was Martin Luther King who defined hope as *the ultimate refusal to give up*.

They told me of how some weeks ago, they had been to a Palestinian village in the northern part of the West Bank, to plant olive trees (some of which had been previously destroyed by extremist Israeli settlers), but they were stopped from doing so by the Israeli army.



In response to the army's action, RHR's Executive Director Avi Dabush stated:

*We came to plant olive trees with rural Palestinian farmers who suffer from systematic violence and harassment, and honor together Tu Beshvat, the Jewish holiday of the trees, with the hope that this kind of activity will build optimism and solidarity between us and our Palestinian partners. It is sad and humbling to see how indiscriminately and arbitrarily the army issues 'closed military' orders as a way to prevent activity that is only about agriculture and peace. It is beyond my understanding why the army would interpret the planting of olive trees and the eating of dried fruit as an 'attempt to break the order.' Surely the only order violated here is the only one that is truly relevant – the traditional call to plant trees on Tu Beshvat. (You can read the full story on their website <https://rhr.org.il/eng/>)*

# PARTNERPLAN



RHR live out their faith in direct connection to the intractable conflict here, and thus embody the solicitation of Micah 6:8 which reads: *And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.* In a context where West Bank Palestinians mostly encounter Israelis who are soldiers or settlers; RHR fulfil a very important role. Their bold stance for justice and their care and compassion towards their Palestinian brothers and sisters; is a living sign of God's hope for a land

scarred by the injustice of occupation.



Drawing of the work of Rabbi Rosenberg Gershon Shaga, scholar Miriam F. Kaye sees the role of the *tsadik* (the righteous), as one that *seizes the shards of destruction and refashions them into building blocks for reconstruction.*<sup>1</sup>

In a world where fear of the other, structural injustice, war, occupation and ecological devastation wreak havoc with our world, God is made known in the lives of those who are committed to reach out beyond all dividing walls, to call for justice and to embody healing.

As the 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish mystic St Teresa of Avila said:

*Christ has no body now but yours.  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.  
Yours are the eyes through which he looks  
compassion on this world.  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.  
Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes,  
you are his body.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

During this season Lent, as we journey with Christ to the cross, we reflect again on what it means to walk in his footsteps. During his fasting in the wilderness, Jesus was tempted with earthly power, as we read in the gospel of Matthew 4:8 *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him: 'all these will I give you, if you fall down and worship me'.* Jesus resists, knowing that the kingdom of God will not be established through earthly power, military might or violence; but through self-giving love.... A love that reaches out and embraces the other, calling us to love our enemies, across the barriers, walls and divisions that scar our world. In the emptiness and loneliness of the wilderness,

---

<sup>1</sup> Miriam Feldmann Kaye, *Jewish Theology for a Postmodern Age* (London: The Litman Library of Jewish Civilization, in assoc with Liverpool University Press, 2019), 46

# PARTNERPLAN

Jesus refuses to accept that our world needs to remain as it is. He calls us as his church, to do the same.

Theologian Walter Bruggemann says that *imagination is the capacity to picture the world out beyond what we take as established given*. He says that *the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (...) constitute an act of immense imagination that intends to subvert all settled social arrangements and power structures.*<sup>2</sup>

RHR, together with other Jewish, Israeli, Palestinian and internationals, have not settled for the world to remain as it is. Instead they seek to re-imagine a different world; and they do so by boldly standing up against injustice and engaging in acts of compassion; something we are all called to do, wherever we find ourselves.



John McCulloch  
(12.3.2020)

---

<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Disruptive Grace: Reflections on God, Scripture & the Church*. Edited by Carolyn J. Sharp (Norwich: SCM Press, 2011), 296.