



The Scream of Gaza | Omar Esstar

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Gaza: A Question of Witness and of the Heart

By Mark Gray

I almost gave up on this article.

What was the point, given the enormous spreading bloodstain erupting from Israel's unrelenting onslaught on Gaza, seeping across West Asia? ("The Middle East" in deeply engrained Western colonial terminology.) What was the point in the face of conspicuous genocide complicity across Europe? What was the point, confronted by the United States' iron-clad, bipartisan support for Israel, enabling and abetting its genocidal fury?

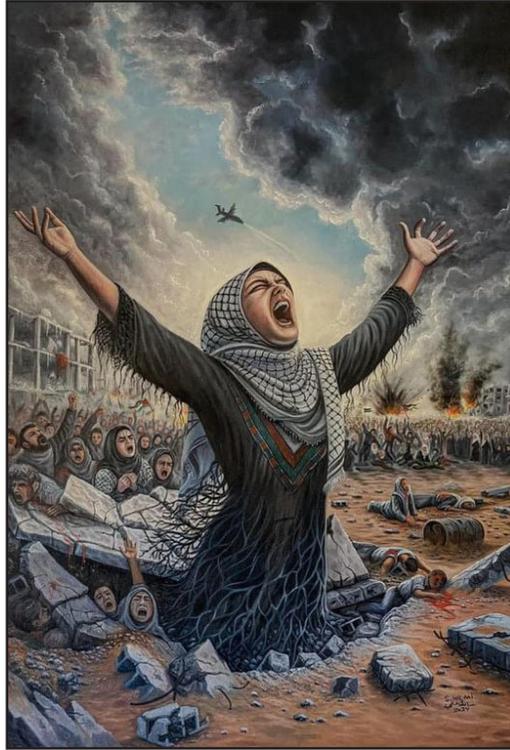
I didn't give up, though. I finished the article as a small act of solidarity with all those who have awakened to protest the appalling slaughter and accompanying de-contextualized narrative, especially young people whose activism has put their future at risk, and Jewish people who see that what is being done in their name is grotesquely at odds with the good Judaism has to offer the world in its search for justice.

Primarily, I finished it as an act of witness to what is happening in Gaza at this moment of Kairos and conscience, in conformity with what Chilean writer Pedro Lemebel identifies as "the eternal struggle of an ethical gaze." This must involve the heart also in how we respond to an inhumanity that is being normalized against a beleaguered, battered, brutalized people.

A multitude of ways has been found to frame the dreadful and disproportionate violence unleashed against Gaza, exemplified in the destruction of schools, hospitals, sewage works, universities, bakeries, museums, water plants, mosques, churches, even cemeteries — every sinew of civilized life.

Gaza has been subjected to more destructive force than across Ukraine in its war with Russia. This small, densely populated strip has suffered the equivalent of at least two atomic bombs. *The Lancet* medical journal estimates that the true Palestinian death toll is reaching toward a minimum of 200,000. Yaakov Garb, a professor at Ben Gurion University, has concluded on the basis of Israeli military data that more than 350,000 Palestinians are missing, many certainly dead. Far more children have been killed than in every conflict around the world since 2019 combined.

The stream of shocking videos and stories keeps rising, a flood of depravity: mass graves; dogs feeding on dead bodies; drones targeting toddlers, shooting them through the head or heart; emaciated children, hunger gnawing at their guts; Palestinian medics forced at gunpoint by Israeli troops to abandon premature babies in al-Nasr Hospital. When the medics return, the babies are dead, their bodies decomposing.



Saed Hilmi

Columbia Seminary graduate, Rev. Dr. Becca Young, has been teaching Palestinian children via Zoom in Gaza and the West Bank. She found an openly posted video of the Beit Hanoun school, where she volunteered, being obliterated. Israeli soldiers roared their approval. She wept. In cosmopolitan Israel, sweaty night-clubbers cavort to a song about burning Palestinian villages. In moon-scape Gaza, Israeli warriors put on the underwear of Palestinian women, whose wrecked homes they ransack. A society unhinged, its moral compass smashed. A child hasn't spoken or eaten in days. When a psychologist finally gets him to talk, he asks a question that stops her cold: "Everyone says my friend went to heaven, but I didn't see his head. How can he go to heaven without his head?" This is Gaza today.

None of it exists in a vacuum, disconnected from history, policies and attitudes.

My grandmother was Jewish. This was just a family curiosity until 2005. I was

in Palestine-Israel learning about grass-roots Palestinian development and Israeli solidarity in the struggle for justice. I mentioned my grandmother to an Israeli human rights activist. Interested, he observed that I could be designated Jewish, with the right of "return" to a land I had never previously been to, had no ties in, and have not set foot in since. I would gain privileges and access which Palestinians, who had roots going back generations, had been stripped of and systematically blocked from ever getting back.

That this intersection of the personal and political was remotely possible was vertiginous and disturbing, especially in light of a poignantly charged story I heard from Nazer Halteh, a wonderfully animated and determined woman working with the YWCA to give Palestinian children and young people the best skills possible to make their way in a cruelly discriminatory system.

Her father-in-law had recently died, his mind ravaged by dementia. As a young man, his entire family had been driven off their farm at the foundation of the Israeli state, forced to live as refugees in their own country. To his last breath, when he remembered nothing else, he kept talking about how he wanted to go home, back to where he was born and grew up, close to historic Jaffa, now swallowed by Tel Aviv.

This is emblematic of the legacy and live significance of the 1948 Nakba, when 750,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed, leaving families with keys to homes from which they had been swept like the detritus of history: a weeping wound, inflamed, untended since.

From a Western perspective, the creation of the state of Israel was a response to the ovens of the holocaust. This arrangement, however, was never morally watertight, and more and more people increasingly understand its inadequacy. Essentially, Eurocentric North Atlantic countries absolved themselves from centuries of deep-seated antisemitism at the expense of Palestinian rights, while inserting a settler-colonial ally in a volatile region. As Edward Said put it, Palestinians have been victimized by the victims.

Remember though, Zionism was a form of 19th-century nationalism, which from its origins aimed at colonizing and Judaizing all of historic Palestine. Key Zionists envisioned the expulsion of the Palestinians long before World War II, as attested by Ilan Pappé, one of the “New Historians” in Israel, who have debunked a distorted Zionist narrative.

Little wonder Rashid Khalidi entitled one of his books *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*. Little wonder either that, since the Nakba, Israel has obdurately defied the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, as international law guarantees. As a parallel strategic policy, it has also relentlessly pursued the partition of Palestine, until it now resembles a fragmented scattering of Bantustans. Here's the reality: Israel is an ethno-nationalist apartheid state. Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela knew this in their bones.

I wish I had time to introduce you to more of the people I met: Ahmed Sourani, giving each of his children seeds at the age of five to teach them that growing anything — including peace — takes time and patience; Suliman Abu Allah, living in the shadow of a massive illegal Israeli settlement, under constant military surveillance, fenced in and cut off from his land

In Israel I felt that one community was trying to eliminate the other: through its policies, the Israeli state appeared determined to erase Palestinians.

by a “Jews only” road; Abu Said Natat, making his farm in Gaza flourish again following the Israeli occupation that had made it a wasteland; Raji Sourani, striving for human rights for decades, still alive after Israeli warplanes destroyed his offices and then his home in the current carnage.

In Palestine, I encountered some of the most hospitable, generous, hopeful people I have met anywhere, all rooted in the related concepts of Sumud and Palestinianity: steadfastness, perseverance and resilience as the cultural, ideological and political foundation of resistance to occupation and oppression.

Encountering Palestinians exposed the depth of my unconscious anti-Palestinian prejudice, based on historical ignorance, old Leon Uris novels and standard Israeli myths. I left with a different view. By that stage of my life, I had been many places in the world, several marked by tension, division and violence, not least my home place, Northern Ireland. In Israel I felt that one community was trying to eliminate the other: through its policies, the Israeli state appeared determined to erase Palestinians. I never shared

this impression with anyone: how can you say that sort of thing?

We are at an apocalyptic point, which is both revelatory and terrifying.

It reveals that the Palestinian people, rather than any ideology or organization, is the problem for Israelis, 82% of whom support the annihilation of Gaza. More starkly than ever before, it reveals the latent genocide lurking in Zionism when Palestinians refuse to accept that their dehumanized role is to “scuttle around

like drugged cockroaches in a bottle,” as General Rafael Eitan described it back in 1983. It reveals the staggering moral vacuity of the global system constructed by the West, now crumbling under the weight of its own hypocrisy. It reveals that the horror in Gaza emerges from the same racist, imperial mindset that drove the slave trade, massacred indigenous people, oversaw colonial famines.

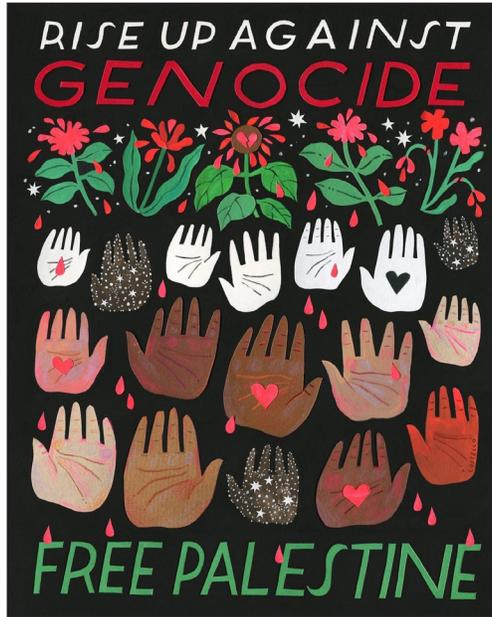
For the terrifying — from which there is a fathomless pool to draw — listen to Ghassan Abu-Sittah, plastic surgeon and founder of the Conflict Medicine Program at the American University of Beirut: “I think we're beyond words ... we're into the final solution where you intentionally create a famine while you're killing people. ... I think the Israelis have decided that expulsion is not going to happen ... people need to be killed where they are.”

It's a bleak assessment.

The people of Gaza are at the heart of darkness, in all its dystopian horror. But the way of tears through the blood of the slaughtered — perhaps — may not end where we dread. A junction has been reached. One direction allows Israel and its backers to continue driving Palestinians to extermination. The other leads to the establishment of a binational, authentically democratic, egalitarian state: equality in dignity and respect; equality in the right of return for refugees; equality in all things as the prerequisite for Palestinians and Israelis to live together. Jeff Halper, an American-Israeli sociologist, has addressed how it could work in his book, *Decolonizing Israel, Liberating Palestine: Zionism, Settler Colonialism and the Case for One Democratic State*.

Some will dismiss and deride this as utopian. But it recognizes that in the Nakba, Israel rendered its own catastrophe inevitable. It articulates a more profoundly hope-oriented reality than the alternative, which will only deepen Israel's crisis of legitimacy, accentuate its status as a pariah state and accelerate its descent into psychopathic violence. Some might clutch at the straw of resuscitating the corpse of the two-state solution. But this would only replicate multiple Gaza scenarios across the splinters of remaining Palestine, dominated and unfree, permanently threatened by rolling genocide. There is no Zionism with a human face. Neither is there any way to be pro-Israel and anti-Zionist.

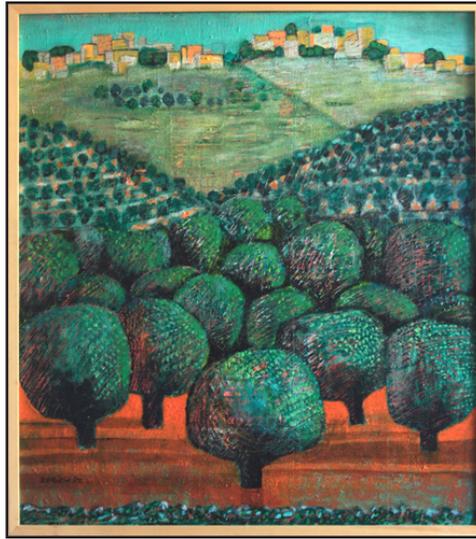
Ordinary people around the world have seen the multi-faceted horror of the live-streamed genocide, and have written, marched, protested. Now, faced with the depravity of Israeli troops being ordered to kill starving, unarmed civilians attempting to get food for their families — one returning soldier acknowledged he felt like a Nazi treating the Jews — it's time to take



Olly Costello

things to a different level. With Western governments prioritizing closing down Palestinian solidarity rather than ending the genocide, it's time to show that ordinary people are not peripheral actors in history, but its authors.

The challenge is massive. But international levers are available to end the Gaza atrocity. Taking a cue from the Gaza Freedom Flotilla and the Global March to Gaza, it's time to mobilize, using all the skills available from every aspect of civil society around the world to pressurise the powers that be to: (1) end the slaughter and starvation by getting a peace-keeping and emergency relief mission into Gaza under Chapter VII of the UN Charter; (2) make West Asia a nuclear-free zone to ensure Israel never has the chance to deploy its Samson option; (3) pursue through the courts all those involved in genocide and war crimes to hold them to account.



Bir Zeit | Nabil Anani

congregations in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. He is married to Betsy Cameron, who is from Cartersville, Georgia, (they met in Malawi). They have three children: Nathan, Hannah and Rose.

It's time to bear witness to the children devoured by fire and famine: the traumatized, targeted, shot, bombed, amputated — often without anaesthetic — children and people of Gaza. It's time to play our tiny part in Tikkun Olam — mending the world: pursuing without ceasing conscience and heart for the good of Gaza and wider Palestine until, with everyone sitting under their own vine and fig tree, the tear is wiped from every eye. And no one will terrorize them or make them afraid anymore. ✚

Mark Gray is a minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. He holds an M.Div. from Columbia Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. from Queen's University, Belfast. A former mission worker to Malawi, he has also served

An American Tragedy

By Justin Jones

This nation has yet again failed to live up to its promise of freedom, denying the most vulnerable amongst us the safety net necessary for economic security and building a better life. Yet again this country has chosen callous indifference to human suffering in order to advance an agenda that defends those whose wealth is built on exploitation and greed. As this country celebrates its 250th birthday, the story we are witnessing is an all too familiar American tragedy.

In 1852 as the brutal and inhumane system of slavery tore America apart, Frederick Douglass spoke to a room of abolitionists gathered in Rochester to ask a simple question: “What to the slave is the Fourth of July?” What to those held in bondage is a holiday that celebrates freedom from tyranny?

Douglass’ answer to his own question is a damning response to our current moment: “a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim.” Today’s 4th of July is a stark reminder that for too many the promise of freedom has gone unfulfilled. Too many suffer from economic exploitation and abuse, too many are forced into poverty by a callous system that refuses to see their humanity and too many are forced to suffer because of others’ greed. Today is a day on which we are reminded of the gross

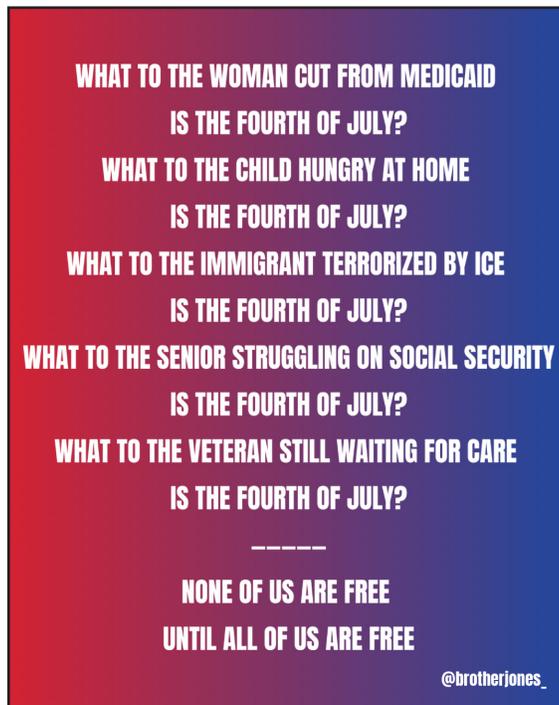
injustice and cruelty we have been made victims of by federal, state and local officials cheering on policies like cutting Medicaid and defunding public schools and reducing SNAP benefits — actions that destroy communities and lead to more suffering.

Today we are reminded that freedom is not just an idea but a lived reality we must fight for.

Douglass ended his speech with hope, that this country is capable of better and we must demand it be better. That we are not powerless or weak, but are engaged in a moral struggle from which we will emerge triumphant. Let this weekend awaken you, let it radicalize you, let it move you to action. Let it be a stark and powerful reminder that none of us are free until all of us are free. ✚

Justin Jones is the District 52 Democratic Representative in the Tennessee Legislature. First elected in 2022, he was one of the two Black Representatives expelled from the Tennessee House in April 2023 as part of the Tennessee Three episode. Jones and Justin Pearson were expelled for breaching rules of decorum by protesting for gun control on the House floor. The protest occurred days after a school shooting in Nashville where six people

were killed. The two lawmakers, along with Representative Gloria Johnson, joined demonstrators in chanting and using a bullhorn to call for stricter gun laws. Johnson, who is white, was not expelled. This piece appeared on Jones’ FaceBook page on the Fourth of July.



Justin Jones

Deep Grief

By Catherine Meeks

As a general rule, I work hard to stay hopeful. I will never vacate that effort, but today I am sad. I am sad because the mean spirit of the Trump administration is so empowered by those who should not be supporting it: The Supreme Court and the Congress. They should be more concerned about the general welfare of the people living in this country and the way that we treat everyone regardless of their birthplace.

Today as I sit at my computer writing this blog, I can hear the Secretary of the United States Treasury proclaiming in a Senate hearing last night that he rejects that more than a half million children have died in the past six months because DOGE decided that USAID was not necessary. These children have died from starvation, and the food that could have saved them is sitting in warehouses where we are paying storage fees instead of it being sent to their designated countries around the world. This is true whether he accepts it or not.

Bill Gates is right to wonder how it feels to Elon Musk — who is supposedly the richest man in the world — to be killing the poorest children in the world with this one action. One wonders how it serves him to be the architect of such cruelty. Of course, he has made it clear that he thinks that empathy is a detriment to being human, when quite the opposite is true. Elon Musk does not realize that it is the lack of empathy that causes one not to be human.

Now this administration is busy trying to pass a budget that cuts food stamp programs and medical assistance to millions of people, who will have to live without health care. One elected official summed up the horror of this action by simply saying, “Everyone has to die,” and another said that folks “will get over the hardship caused them.” I wonder how those officials would like to live in a world where it is they

who have to seek food and medicines, as those who are poor do now.

The Supreme Court falls, too often, in line with this spirit of evil and darkness in its rulings as well. The Court should be ashamed of itself for some of their scandalous rulings about immigration that allow for the continued dehumanization of immigrants.

Along with the Court, Congress is for the most part absent from any effort to support the general welfare. What is the matter with the Republican elected officials? Do they not understand that the mid-terms are coming, and that many of us are working hard to make sure that they lose their seats because they have not stood up

stranger to us.” He adds, “If you read the Gospels, the things that profoundly mattered to Christ, marginally matter to most evangelical Christians. And the things that really profoundly matter to them marginally mattered to Christ.”

How true is his comment? Jesus was never interested in dehumanizing anyone. People who are claiming to follow him do not have the luxury of picking what they like and leaving what they do not like. He was not about abuse, brutality, hatred, disregard and disrespect, as so many seem to feel is perfectly acceptable in this present moment. But the truth is that it is not acceptable even if you do not follow Jesus. It is not acceptable for anyone who is trying

to be a decent human to inflict the pain and suffering upon others that we are witnessing as we experience this 21st-century iteration of systemic racism that is being perpetrated by the Trump administration and its supporters.

Thanks be to God that many millions are standing against this current administration’s reign of terror. We need millions more to join us. We cannot rest as long as people are being dehumanized, marginalized and treated as less than worthy humans. We cannot rest until more decency and concern for the general welfare of us all is evident in those who are selected and elected to lead us. We cannot and must not rest. Let’s be a

half shade braver. †

Catherine Meeks was the recipient of the Joseph R. Biden Lifetime Achievement and Service Award in 2022. She is the Founder and Executive Director of the Turquoise and Lavender Institute for Transformation and Healing. She has published eight books, including her latest, The Quilted Life: Reflections of a Sharecropper’s Daughter, in 2024. She and Nibs Stroupe are authors of Passionate for Justice (2019), a book about the life and witness of Ida B. Wells for our time. She is involved with prison work, visits on death row and works for the abolition of the death penalty. This article first appeared in the Turquoise & Lavender blog of June 27, 2025. (cmeeks@turquoiseandlavender.com)



Calvin Kimbrough

No King! Rally in Nashville, Tennessee.

to help support the general welfare of the people who live on our soil?

Many claim that we live in a Christian nation. I wonder. What is Christian about disrupting the lives of good, law-abiding persons who have been here for decades as undocumented persons for a variety of reasons. They have committed no crime except that of wishing to be free of oppression and poverty. Unfortunately, in some cases the United States is a contributor to some of the ills in their homelands that have caused them to flee. So, as we continue to declare ourselves to be a nation of Christians, we have to consider this comment from theologian Miroslav Volf who writes, “I’ve come to believe ... that the Christ of the Gospels has become a moral

Rest In Peace, Kenyatta

By John Cole Vodicka

Editor's note: *John Cole Vodicka co-founded and coordinates the all-volunteer Athens Area Courtwatch Project in Athens, Georgia. Since 2019 John and other courtwatchers have observed thousands of felony and misdemeanor hearings in Clarke County courtrooms. The Courtwatch Project also administers a community bail fund and posts small cash bonds for indigent defendants unable to purchase their pretrial liberty. That's how John got to know Kenyatta Booze, when, in 2023, he posted Mr. Booze's \$10 bond to spring him from captivity on a misdemeanor trespass charge. In the April/May issue of Hospitality, John traced Kenyatta Booze's surreal journey through Athens' criminal legal system.*

From July 12, 2023 — when I first met him — until June 7, 2025, Kenyatta Booze spent almost 600 days in confinement. His dozen misdemeanor arrests over this time period were almost always for the despicable crime of trespassing.

On Friday, May 30 of this year, Kenyatta Booze appeared in front of a State Court judge in Athens-Clarke County, Georgia. He'd been locked up — again — since March 18, on another trespassing charge and was unable to afford a \$100 bond. At his May 30 hearing, the judge reduced his bond to \$1. My church's community bail fund had assisted Mr. Booze to gain his pretrial liberty a half-dozen times over the past two years. But this time, without our help, Mr. Booze was able to post his \$1 bond on June 5. That afternoon he left the jailhouse.

According to Mr. Booze's mother, Dorothy Griffin, her son walked the six miles from the jail to the Food Fresh grocery store, a business he'd been previously barred from. But he still often slept behind the store, between the building's loading dock and a row of rented storage units. He sat down in a discarded rocking chair in front of one of the storage units to enjoy his respite from the jailhouse.

Thirty-six hours later, sitting in that same rocking chair, Kenyatta Booze died. His body was discovered by an employee of the store. The coroner determined the cause of death as “atherosclerotic



John Cole Vodicka

Kenyatta Booze and John Cole Vodicka

cardiovascular disease.” Kenyatta Booze's 58-year-old heart gave out.

“I walked around back Saturday morning when I got to work,” Dillon, the Food Fresh employee, told me recently. “He was sitting in the rocking chair facing the storage units. His shoes were next to the chair on the concrete. He'd passed.”

Dillon said he'd seen Mr. Booze behind the store on numerous occasions in the past. “He'd smile at me, wave. I saw him that Thursday afternoon (June 5), too.”

Dillon had viewed security camera footage after Mr. Booze's death. He described to me what he saw. “We had that real bad rainstorm on Friday night. You can see him huddled over in the rocking chair, walking out of the camera's view for a few minutes, then returning to the chair. All through the night, during the rain and lightning. I hate that he had to be outside in that storm.”

The security camera images showed Mr. Booze sitting in the rocking chair early Saturday morning, too. He's facing away from the storage units, holding a piece of fruit in his hands. “He turns the chair around, so his back is to the camera,” Dillon tells me. “Then you see his arms shoot out to both sides of the chair, the fruit goes flying and his arms are dangling off the arm rests. He's dead.”

The coroner's autopsy noted the time of death at 8:30 a.m.

Dorothy Griffin was convinced all along that her son's heart was failing him,

and that he'd suffered a stroke several years ago, leading to neurological damage that changed Mr. Booze's behavior dramatically. “Something happened to Kenyatta, and he's not right anymore,” she told me in 2023. “My son is not a criminal.”

In addition to his 83-year-old mother, Dorothy, Kenyatta Booze left behind two adult children, Kalupe and India, and an assemblage of family members and friends.

Four Athens Area Courtwatch Project volunteers attended Mr. Booze's memorial service

on June 21. More than 100 people gathered in the church sanctuary. They shared stories of Mr. Booze's childhood, his athletic prowess, his neighborhood organizing, his time at Paine College in Augusta, his long-distance truck driving career. “Kenyatta always had that big smile, was funny, a flat-out cool brother,” one of the mourners shared.

I consider myself fortunate to have known Mr. Booze even though it was only when I bailed him out of jail, provided transportation to courthouse hearings, or visited him on the streets or at his campsites. The last time I was with Kenyatta Booze was in late February, when I posted his bail and drove him to a downtown Athens church where Mr. Booze told me he'd be safe and could eat some lunch. I gave him a used backpack stuffed with socks, t-shirts and underwear I'd bought for him. I added a grey hoodie and toiletries to the mix. I gave him a little spending money. We hugged.

As I walked back to my car, Mr. Booze called after me, “It's gonna be alright, John.” ♣

John and Dee Cole Vodicka and sons were Resident Volunteers at the Open Door Community in 1985-86 and 1992-93. John founded and, for 15 years, directed the Prison & Jail Project in Americus, Georgia. Today he is an activist, writer and community organizer who lives in Athens, Georgia.
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Start Small, Stay Small

By Pete Gathje

Therese of Lisieux and Dorothy Day emphasized “the little way,” or what Shannon K. Evans terms “the worthiness of the small.” The little way endorses being modest and not running after grandeur and the grandiose. About twenty years ago, those of us gathering to discuss a vision for hospitality for Manna House sought to be faithful to the little way. We committed to starting small and staying small. Hospitality, we believed, required welcoming our guests as individual persons with names, stories, dignity. We did not set as goals “ending homelessness,” or “saving” people. Rather,



Manna House

We committed to starting small and staying small. Hospitality, we believed, required welcoming our guests as individual persons with names, stories, dignity.

we sought to offer hospitality, to meet a few modest needs in a little way that would respect our guests as human beings made in the image of God.

I have found over the years that I sometimes fall into three temptations to abandon hospitality animated by this little way.

In the first temptation, I seek control over those we welcome. This is evident whenever I focus on being more efficient. In offering showers, I try to do more and more showers in less and less time. In offering “socks and hygiene” I just hand over what we have instead of taking the time to have each guest say what they want. When I seek control, I forget that efficiency is the work of the devil. Instead, I fall into the oxymoron of “efficient hospitality.” When I seek to be in control, I offer hospitality according to my convenience and desires. I rush guests rather than respect them as persons.

In the second temptation I engage in the opposite of control. I practice a grandiose generosity in which “anything goes.” I violate boundaries. I give without concern for consistency. If a guest asks for it, I give it. Like control, anything goes is more

about my desires than hospitality. I desire to be lauded as generous, as kind-hearted.

Anything goes feeds my desire to be a savior who can do everything for everyone.

The third temptation is also grounded in my expansive ego and reflects the oxymoron of “successful hospitality.” In this temptation, the hope I have for every guest, that they will have good lives, gets distorted into my desire to remake guests in my image. In this temptation, I measure my “success” in hospitality by how many people I get off the streets. I use my white middle class standards to define what our guests should aspire to. I want them to conform to my social standards of respectability. I deny their agency, their hopes, dreams, desires and woundedness — their personhood. They become means to my ends.

In contrast, hospitality offered in the “little way” asks me to simply welcome people as they are. As Michael Sean Winters writes, “Success is not a Gospel category.” Rather than pushing others to conform to my expectations, I must drop my ego and allow the guests to change me. In hospitality it is much more likely that the guests save me rather than the other way around. This was Jesus’ point when he said, “Whatever you do unto the least of these

you do unto me” (Matthew 25:31-46), and when Paul said, “Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you.” (Romans 15:7)

So, the hospitality offered at Manna House in the little way is not much. Two mornings each week for showers, socks and hygiene, coffee, sanctuary. One Monday meal each week. Each morning, six to eight volunteers, 100 or so guests. We do not pretend to be efficient, to provide a “solution” to homelessness, to meet every need or to successfully remake people on the streets into productive citizens.

Our purpose is hospitality, not charity doled out from above nor social services to get people back into the system. We do not get people off the streets or out of poverty. We provide a place for people to be welcomed as people. It is a small thing. It doesn’t amount to much. Like a mustard seed. And we hope, in the words of the prophet Zechariah, we will “not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin.” (Zechariah 4:10) ♣

Peter Gathje is Professor of Religion at LeMoyne-Owen College and a founder of Manna House, a place of hospitality in Memphis. He wrote Sharing the Bread of Life: Hospitality and Resistance at the Open Door Community (2006) and edited A Work of Hospitality: The Open Door Reader 1982–2002. This article first appeared in radicalhospitalityblog May 13, 2025). (peter_gathje@loc.edu)

Parenting with Hope in a Climate Crisis

A Review of *This Sweet Earth*

by Heather Bargeron

My seven-year-old has a fearful fascination with storms, especially tornadoes. Fortunately, the Philadelphia public library system stopped charging overdue book fees. Otherwise we would be in deep debt due to the number of storm-themed books we have checked out for months at a time.

Several times while studying one of these books, he has turned to me and said, as both statement and question, “But tornadoes are very rare where we live... right?” I pause, looking at his face and pondering how to answer. How do I explain that the frequency and severity of storms is increasing in our area as the planet warms? How much do I say about climate catastrophes that have already taken the lives of thousands around the world — mostly poor people? How to explain that we have the power to change this trajectory, but that I worry that those with the most power to do so never will?

A few weeks ago in mid-June, we had a series of days with record high temperatures in Philadelphia. One day the high was

The starting point that Wylie-Kellerman suggests is easy to access; learn about the place you are in. Often with her children as guides, together they explore and study the trees, the birds, the creatures in the dirt and streams around them.

101 degrees with a heat index of 106, the hottest day in June in this city in over 30 years. This so-called heat dome on the east coast gave way to severe thunderstorms causing flash floods and high winds, including several tornado warnings throughout our region.

Watching the increase in severe weather patterns or hearing of the latest climate catastrophe is enough to fill any of us with paralyzing anxiety and grief. For those of us who are parents, or anyone whose lives are intimately connected with children, there is another layer of worry and sense of obligation. In her recent book, *This Sweet Earth*, Lydia Wylie-Kellerman gives voice to the questions we are wrestling with: “How do we stay grounded? What do we tell them? What skills will they need?”

She does not approach these

This Sweet Earth

Walking with Our Children
in the Age of Climate Collapse

by **Lydia Wylie-Kellermann**

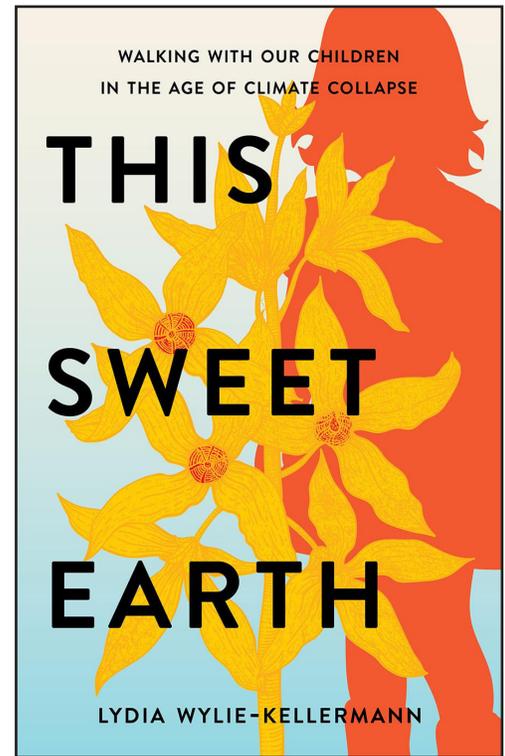
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questions as an environmental expert, but with the humility of a parent who feels the grief of a suffering planet and is trying to keep her eyes open. As a parent myself who is often consumed with daily mundane tasks and struggling to stay present, I appreciate her confession that she is “a regular old mom” who amidst all the frustration and exhaustion that parenting entails, is just trying to pay attention. She seeks to respond to her grief, in conversation with her own children, with embodied hope and practice.

The starting point that Wylie-Kellerman suggests is easy to access; learn about the place you are in. Often with her children as guides, together they explore and study the trees, the birds, the creatures in the dirt and streams around them. As with any justice movement, this one

starts with seeing and naming those who are otherwise forgotten or systematically erased — in this case, the birds, the plants, the bugs. She quotes the Senegalese engineer and activist, Baba Dioum, saying, “You can’t save a place you don’t love. You can’t love a place you don’t know. And you can’t know a place you haven’t learned.” Naming creates memory and denotes what has value in our lives, so that we notice if those creatures disappear.

Connecting with place and the rhythms of nature also calls us to a different sense of time and what is sacred. Living in a bustling city, my family often feels the pace and the noise taking a toll on our spirits and bodies. Not to mention the information overload that floods us through our various technological devices. There are times when my partner and I will look at each other and at our kid literally



climbing the walls and say, “We need to get outside!”

It is like a primal call to reconnect our feet to the earth, to hear the rustle of the leaves in the wind, to have our face and eyes flooded with sunlight instead of LEDs. We know we will return from a walk in the woods, or even just the backyard, changed. Wylie-Kellerman invites us to consider this a call to prayer. She says, “If I spent more time praying up in a maple tree or lying in the beach grass, I would walk differently. I would mourn for losses I had not seen. And I would be forever changed.”

She also reminds the reader that we do not pray or act alone. She recalls how it became clear in the early days of the pandemic that we could not sustain the anxiety and exhaustion of that crisis on our own. I think the same can be said for this current socio-political moment of hard-heartedness and hegemony. We have to carry each other and remind one another that there is goodness, mercy and, yes, even joy. Wylie-Kellerman proposes that the ordinary ways we show up for one another — growing food, checking in on the most vulnerable neighbors, sharing resources — are part of our disaster preparedness. The climate crisis will continue to test our

hyper-individualistic society. We will not find the solutions nor survive the impact on our own. We need to be practicing mutual care and receiving the wisdom and gifts of others.

And I resonate with her assertion that this also goes for parenting. Especially as a white parent of a child of color, I give thanks that I am not responsible for teaching my kid everything. There are skills and wisdom that I cannot offer him. Part of the formation of whiteness in this country is the myth that we are separate from and superior to the rest of creation. I need companions to teach me and my child old and new stories, traditions and practices that remind us of our interdependency with the earth.

I also need help telling the truth about the destruction and death that is being wrought on our earth and fellow creatures. *This Sweet Earth* reminds me that telling

the truth about our fear, our grief, our outrage and our lack of answers is also a gift to our children. They need permission to feel all those things, too. Their security will come from an unwavering love in the midst of struggling with the truth of the dangers that face places and people they care about, not from being deceived into thinking that nothing is wrong.

Wylie-Kellerman also reminds me of the power of small, ordinary practices of resistance and creativity — resisting the powers that deal death to our earth and our neighbors, while creating the world we long for in our household and community. This may look like inviting our children to draw their own protest signs and to play at our feet during an organizing meeting. It also looks like reducing plastic use, baking bread, working less and playing more outside. This book contains beautiful stories

and poetry, but it also offers practical ideas, a list of 100 of them to be exact. It includes small acts like hanging a bird feeder, and bigger ones like building a composting toilet. She prefaces the list by saying it is not meant to be comprehensive nor a checklist, but simply to spark the imagination. I would add #101 on this list: buy *This Sweet Earth* from somewhere other than Amazon, read it and give it to a friend. ♣

Heather Bargeron is a former Resident Volunteer and current board member of the Open Door Community. She is the Communications and Operations Manager with Casa Alternativa, an organization practicing radical hospitality with vulnerable immigrants. She lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with her wife and 7-year old kiddo. (hbargeron@gmail.com)

To be of use

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

— Marge Piercy

*Piercy was born into a working-class family in Detroit in 1936. She was an organizer for SDS at one point. She is the author of 17 books. Her work is rooted in her Jewish heritage, Marxism, social and political activism and feminist ideals. "To be of use" is from *Circles on the Water*, 1982.*

Flag Theft #2

Decatur Presbyterian Church

By Ed Loring

By the time I stole the USA Flag from Columbia Presbyterian Church, I believed the flag was idolatrous in the church, particularly in the sanctuary. The flag is a symbol of nationalism and patriotism. The Body of Jesus Christ is universal. There is no American Christianity. There is, thanks be to the Holy One, Christianity in America. William Stringfellow notes this problem in churches in the USA. Christians, he argues, read the bible Americanly (God's chosen people) rather than read America biblically (a nation consumed by greed, hubris and war).

I learned from Judas Maccabeus, the Hammer of God, who cleansed the temple and led a winning rebellion against those who defiled the temple; and from Jesus, the son of God, who, like Judas Maccabeus, cleansed the temple, turning over tables and whipping the money men until they ran and hid among the Romans. In reading the stories by Lectio Divina, that is reading between the lines for a message to

myself, I heard a call to steal flags from churches, to cleanse the sanctuary from the idolatries of nationalism and patriotism and the domestication of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the name of "God Bless America."

Dr. Charles Cousar was a friend of mine. During my student days at Columbia Seminary, Dr. Cousar taught me Greek and New Testament. When I returned to Columbia Seminary as assistant professor of American Christianity (sic), Charlie was a colleague. We often played tennis and complained about the way the fundamentalists abused the scriptures.

Charlie Cousar died after a long and debilitating illness. Dr. Erskine Clarke, also of Columbia Seminary and professor of American Christianity (sic) after my banishment from there, gave the eulogy. Erskine began by sharing that Charlie did not want a personal eulogy but a proclamation of the doctrine of the Resurrection. Erskine proceeded with an erudite and convicting proclamation. Charlie got what was asked for and was seldom mentioned.

After the benediction, I hung back while Murphy Davis and others went to the fellowship hall for a reception. The flag stood to the left when facing the pulpit. In the corner just below the ceiling was a video camera, and I could see myself on the screen. "This will never work," said I to me, "the security already has me on camera." But I was alone in the large sanctuary and for a fleeting moment I thought I saw John the Baptist with his head back, winking at me. With that I grabbed the flagpole, moved quickly out of the sanctuary, took the flag off the pole and left the pole lying there. Went out to the car and placed the flag under the front seat. Returned to the reception and had a special time listening to and telling Cousar stories.

Later I did with the American flag what I have done with all the flags I have stolen.

Jesus Christ is Lord! Our crucified, risen savior is for all people everywhere, and a national or ethnic church is heresy. Amen. †

Eduard Nuessner Loring is an Activist/ Advocate/Ally at the Open Door Community in Baltimore. Pronouns: he, him, his. (edloring@opendoorcommunity.org)



Willa Bickham

The Third Coming

(with apologies to William Butler Yeats, *The Second Coming*)

Spinning and twisting wildly
Our unhinged citizens wander aimlessly.
The country: falling apart! The constitution: in shreds.
The cry of the poor stifled.
Jail, deportations and stupidity are the laws of the land.

Authoritarians have trampled free speech.
Bitter greedy waves overwhelm our shores.
Everywhere the innocent are iced by masked thugs.

And sadly, even many of the best lack all conviction,
While the worst are filled with hateful intensity.

Surely, somewhere, somehow, light will peek through.
Surely, the nightmare and darkness will cease.
Surely, resistance and truth-doing will be our strength.
Surely, justice and hope will be our morning prayer.

— Brendan Walsh

Willa Bickham and Brendan Walsh opened Viva House Catholic Worker in Baltimore, Maryland in 1968. Viva House serves as a soup kitchen, food pantry and a place working nonviolently to do the Works of Mercy and resist the Works of War. (vivacatholicworker@gmail.com)

No King! Nashville 7/14/25



Photographs by Calvin Kimbrough

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Ed & Co.! Hello again!!

We are feeling sooo powerless as our country goes from “how can we help you share in our prosperity” to “you are not my problem, leave me alone!!”

Loading humans into an airplane, OUCH! We are better than that — let us truly make America great again.

Ed & Barb Kusek
Hartford, Wisconsin

Dear Ed:

Love to read your *Hospitality*. Especially the writing on the American flag in *The Box* in the April/May issue.

Ed Crouch
Seattle, Washington

Dear David:

I hope this email finds you well! It’s Renée Roden, one of the editors at *Roundtable*. We would love to reprint a couple of issues from April/May of *Hospitality*, particularly the piece “For Whom the Bell Tolls” (Mary Catherine Johnson) and “My Season with Kenyatta” (John Vodicka).

Would you be willing to let us re-print these articles for an upcoming issue of *Roundtable*? We publish long-form articles on Thursdays and Fridays and share them in our weekly Sunday digest newsletter. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Many thanks,
Renée Roden
St. Martin de Porres
Catholic Worker
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

HOSPITALITY

HOSPITALITY is published by the Open Door Community, Inc., Baltimore, Maryland. The Open Door is a Prophetic Discipleship Community honoring the Black Jesus, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard.

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HOSPITALITY *prays*

Prayer is the heart of a genuine Christian radicalism. — Ron Ferguson



Calvin Kimbrough

O King of Kings

We remember the hoarding ways of Egypt's Pharaoh
who enslaved the people of Israel
for centuries of brutal captivity.

We remember other painful stories about savage Kings in many nations
who used military power
to control their subjects and deny human freedom.

We remember the more recent quest of Adolf Hitler
who lusted for world dominance and racial purity
and slaughtered millions to establish a master race of non-Jewish people,
while Christian nationalists ignored the Third Reich's evil plot.

Yet, our nation has recently elected a president who now seeks to be our "king,"
a king who devalues democracy, inclusivity and equality;
a king who replaces truth and honesty with self-serving lies;
a king who champions the rich at the expense of the poor;
a king who urges Christian nationalists to follow him as their spokesperson.

Forgive us, O God,
when we greedily pursue our own personal wealth
instead of sharing our resources with impoverished neighbors;
when we are seduced into following egotistical political authorities
instead of embodying your compassion and justice in our lives;
when we disregard the deep wounds of our fractured history
instead of celebrating your bold truth and your love for all people.

You, O God, are the Lord of all lords, the King of all kings.
You are the Creator of all that is good and just and loving.
You are the one true King who is worthy of our complete loyalty;
the one King who seeks peace and justice amidst hatred and inequality;
the one King who values people regardless of race, nationality or sexual orientation;
the one King that we are blessed to know through Jesus, the Christ.

Make us forever grateful for your loving and just kingship.
Guide us to dethrone the ungodly kings in our lives.
Empower us to be forever loyal to you.
Amen and Amen.

— Lee Carroll
Offered during the "No King" protests, Summer 2025

Lee Carroll is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Associate Professor Emeritus of Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia. He is the current chair of the Board of Directors of the Open Door Community. (lc Carroll@ix.netcom.com)