

# ISRAEL/GAFCON JOURNAL

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## Monday and Tuesday, June 16-17: Arrival and Coastal Israel

The flight to Israel went without a hitch, though it was exhausting. A little more than 24 hours from start to stop, and just a couple of hours of sleep in there. But we all arrived safely. There are 22 people in our study group, and we have a full-sized modern bus at our disposal.

After a half night of sleep in Netanya (45 minutes north of Tel Aviv) we were out the door for a full day of touring up the coast. The focus was Old Testament and Roman influence. We went in turn to Caesarea (very impressive, built by Herod the Great), which was the Roman capital of the province at the time of Jesus and Paul. The Romans could build!



Then on to Mt Carmel, where Elijah had his showdown with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). From the top of that mountain, we could see all across the Jezreel valley - and see in turn five or six other places of major biblical events. F-16s were taking off from a military airport, booming right over our heads. The connection was not lost.

From there we went to Megiddo (Rev 16:6), the place some believe to be prophesied to be the place of Armageddon. It is a 'tel', a mound, with some 30 layers of civilization being unearthed. It sits right at the crossroads of the major trade route from Egypt to Mesopotamia, which is the fact behind its strategic value over the centuries. The archeology around here at sights like that is interesting and impressive.

Then we headed to Nazareth, the place of the annunciation and the childhood residence of Jesus. It is now a fully Arab town, and you could immediately tell. In Jesus' day it was probably no larger than 500 people.

By 6pm we were in Tiberius, and checked in at our current hotel, which was very nice. We are directly in the Sea of Galilee, and earlier tonight I walked out of my room, down to the beach and swam in it. Funny, but that is the sea Jesus walked on. I just swam. Hmmm!

## Wednesday, June 18: Galilee of the Gentiles!

You can see the whole lake in a sweep of the eyes, with hills on the opposite side rising steeply. It is beautiful. Most of Jesus' ministry happened in the NW quadrant of the Sea of Galilee. You can see it all at the same time, standing on almost any part of the shore.

Fell asleep quickly, but woke at 5am. Morning Prayer by myself out next to the sea, and off on another day. Today the focus was on Galilee, and the ministry of Jesus here. We started out up at Korazim, a village built of basalt rock. Typical ruins from the 2nd century, with the outlines of a house, baths for purification, a synagogue, and surrounding buildings. Most of the teaching today was on the reactions to the Roman presence: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots. There are parallels between these movements and what we have seen in the Anglican realignment. Worth thought... We talked a lot about synagogue life in normal villages.



We went on to the Mount of the Beatitudes where Jesus may have preached the Sermon on the Mount. We talked about his teaching on the Kingdom, and we walked from that hill down to the sea - about 40 minutes. Everywhere it is hot and dusty.

Our next stop was Capernaum, Jesus' base of operations in Galilee. There are remains there of what was very likely Peter's house, and ruins of a synagogue. It was very hot by this time, about 109° I was told!

We talked about what it meant to him to move from Nazareth to Capernaum, and about how this city functioned as a major economic crossroads.

From there we went in succession to Tabgha (the place where Peter was reconciled to Jesus after the resurrection), Nol Ginosar (a museum where there was a 2000 year old fishing boat that had been discovered and preserved), and then boarded a boat for a 45-minute ride back to Tiberius. We quickly changed and went for a swim in the sea, then into the pool, then showered and went to dinner. After dinner we had a discussion on what has stood out for us... Many things. Here are a few of my own to date:

- I am stunned by the cruelty of the ancient world. It is unavoidable. Especially the severity of the Romans in their rule, and their treatment of enemies in warfare... brutal.
- I am also shocked by the harshness of this land. Life is hard here. Many of the places we visited simply had no possible way to support life. The land is rocky and hills are everywhere. There is little water. It is dry and hot.

- God chose this place to give to a special people. God chooses people and places for his purposes. Perhaps the harshness of the land was the condition to draw out dependence and faith and trust in him. It seems he still does that in our lives these days. Bless him for the rocks!
- Kay (our tour guide - she is great) said, "God chose Israel because he loved the Gentiles." I have thought a lot about that. And we could add that God chose us because he loves our co-workers and neighbors and friends and enemies.
- Arab Nazareth is these days a large, suffering city on a hill. The difference between Arab cities and Jewish cities is palpable. There is something broken in Arab culture, and there is much suffering. The position of Palestinian Christians is the most unbearable—hated by Moslem Arabs and Israelites.
- Israel is a modern state with ancient realities, all mixed together. The modern state and culture is thoroughly secular. And there is still much observant Judaism.
- Israel is a land that has had to contend for its faith and its existence. Everywhere you see that about Israel. You can feel it in the air, walking through airports or Arab cities. They feel no one can be depended on for their survival. That is a historic fact that is millennia old—and it is a present day reality. Israel lives in opposition.
- God is bringing GAFCON to Jerusalem, to this place of opposition and faith and heritage. We are also a movement that has had to contend for our faith and that widely has had to pay a price. And God is bringing us here to this place, this land, this people for a very important moment in our formation. That fact has caught my attention.

## Thursday June 19: Golan Heights and N. Israel



We started off in Qasrin Park up north of the Galilee. It is an ancient Talmudic Village and Synagogue made out of the ever present basalt (volcanic) rock. That rock is extra hard, and doesn't absorb water (more on that later). In using it for building it is most often uncut, so walls look like piled up stones. The village was authentically reconstructed, giving an accurate impression of village life in the second century AD and before. We looked carefully at an oil press (olive oil was used for light, soap, cosmetics, medicine,

cooking and fuel). We looked at olive trees, and the process of grafting a branch in, and how after many years it is almost impossible to tell the grafted branches from the

originals (Jeremiah 11; Romans 9-11). We had a detailed discussion of bread-making and agriculture in the ancient world.

From there we headed up into the Golan Heights and northern Israel for the rest of the day. Along the way we noted again the volcanic geography and the basalt rocks throughout the fields and slopes, making life very difficult in this region. We had a lengthy discussion of much of modern and ancient history of the region, including the 1967 and 1973 wars here with Syria and Egypt, the impact of Shiite Islam on the current situation, the threat of Iran and the bomb, the peace with Jordan, and Syrian encroachment on the border area through settlements. We stopped and looked over the border with Syria and Lebanon several times.

We ate lunch at a Druze village. The Druze are an offshoot of Islam who believe in reincarnation. Druze who have assimilated into Israel are some of their most fearless fighters because they do not fear death. These Druze, however, have a fear of returning to Syrian rule.



By now we are in the foothills of Mt Hermon, which towers over all the other volcanic mountains, but is itself not volcanic, but limestone. That means it absorbs the snows on its slopes (there was still some visible) and slowly over the years filters them. They emerge decades (perhaps centuries) later as springs of clear, pure water from the foothills of Hermon. We went to two nature Reserves in these foothills, Hermon Stream and Tel Dan. These are the water sources of the Jordan River, which flows from these

foothills some 40-50 miles south into the Galilee, and then out from the lower Galilee all the way to the Dead Sea. These springs were a primary fact in ancient wars and modern wars. The Syrians tried to divert the waters from the Jordan, part of the reason for the 1973 war. Whoever controls the water controls the agriculture and the settlements and the population. The springs are large, surging out of the base of limestone cliffs, quickly turning into rushing creeks some 20-30 feet wide and 1-2 feet deep. Herod Agrippa had palaces here, and the ruins are being excavated. The water is snow-cold and wonderful to walk in, cooling you right off from the arid, hot air.

We walked up a lengthy stream path at Tel Dan to the source of another spring, which was weaving in and out of thick old trees and vines. Anywhere along you could fill up your water bottle from the stream without risk. The water, they believe, has not surfaced for over 100 years since it was snow on Hermon. Part of the reason they know this is that when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, the fallout put radioactive traces on all water sources around the world. 60 years later these springs still show no such traces, indicating they have been underground all that time and more. It is a place of great beauty and history and things to ponder.

We paused for a wonderful teaching on living water, on how the Israelites were never given this territory in the original promised land, but ancient Dan moved in to take it, and how that led to idolatry. In Jeremiah's words (ch. 2) they forsook living water for cisterns built with their own hands that cracked and could not hold the water. A fatal mistake.



The excavations at Tel Dan included the ancient Temple set up there in opposition to Jerusalem (Judges 18.27-29). We saw the gates of the city which have been recently uncovered (2 Kings 23.8) and more impressively the very large altar (35 feet or so square, 12 feet or so high) that dominated this northern temple, a place where a golden calf was set up (1 Kings 12.28-29) in opposition to Jerusalem (some 180 miles to the south). The syncretism of Dan and its disappearance from history

under the judgment of God is a bracing lesson of history.

On the way home, we stopped at a place that arguably could have been the site of the Transfiguration. And we paused to look at Crusader ruins. We also noted that all day we were on the 'Road to Damascus' that Paul would have walked. It was likely in these hills that he was converted. We were within 15 miles of Damascus in this area!

Well, at the end of the day, I was exhausted, and went to bed early without dinner. Far too much sun! Now I am up at 5am again, refreshed and alert and ready for the day ahead. Today will be more and more sun. We will be traveling down the Jordan Valley, slowly making our way to Jerusalem, with stops on the Jordan River, The Dead Sea, the Ein Gedi Nature Preserve, and the ancient site of the Essenes at Qumran.

I will write more from Jerusalem... What a remarkable experience to visit this special place that I have so long studied and imagined and learned from.

## **Friday, June 20: Jordan, the Dead Sea, and Jerusalem**

Well, Friday I went down to the Jordan River (for baptisms for many of our group—not me; already been baptized!) and then we headed south to the Dead Sea (where a bunch went swimming) and to the Ein Gedi Nature Preserve. Ein Gedi is where David hid from Saul—a beautiful place way out in the wilderness, near an 80 foot waterfall that comes out of the mountains. It was wild and dry and HOT and beautiful.



We also went to the Qumran area where the Essenes lived in the wilderness. The excavations around their living area give you a good feel for their lives—total separation from the culture, living in the desert, total devotion to God and the Scriptures, waiting for the Messiah. The whole day was desert experiences around the Dead Sea area.

I love the desert. In fact, Ein Gedi and Tel Dan are probably the favorites of all I have seen so far. They are wild and beautiful oases in

otherwise inhabitable areas. And they were places of resistance to corrupt forces and total devotion to God (well, not at Dan where they had that golden calf!).

After swimming in the Dead Sea, we drove through Jericho and then up the mountains into Jerusalem. On the way up we read the Psalms of Ascent (120-135), traditionally sung by Jewish people on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The first sight of the city was stunning—so large, so full of people, and with a beauty that makes a quick mark.



After dinner we went to the Western Wall for the start of Shabbat (Sabbath). The streets were full of people coming and going, most of them observant Jewish families. In due time I got to the wall for 15 minutes of prayers. It was a wonderful moment. We walked back through the Jewish quarter and the Armenian Quarter to the Christian Quarter and a cab home. Our hotel is very simple but adequate, and right next to the place of the conference - but a 45 minute walk from the Old City. I will have to find a way to get there often.

## **Saturday, June 21: Jerusalem at Sabbath**

I wanted to write a bit about the Shabbot (Sabbath) last night. When Sabbath started here on Friday evening, everything shuts down. No cars or busses during these 24 hours, no shops open (except in the Arab Quarter). In our hotel, a room was given over to a synagogue, which was filled with loud singing! Joyful singing of prayers.

When we went to the Wall later in the evening (following the tradition to go to the wall as soon as you can when coming to Jerusalem), there were many Jewish families coming back up the alleys. They looked happy and at ease with life and wonderful. They were dressed for Shabbot, with white shirts and black pants and skirts and men in

black hats and ties and some with black coats. The children and women looked beautiful. The men and the women had a dignity.

Then we got to the Wall, and went down through the guarded gate (like an airport) into the large stone courtyard. People were leaving by this time, but many remained. We were allowed to go to the Wall and pray, after a bit of instruction (reverence, wear a paper skullcap, be free to pray as you wish, OK to insert a paper prayer in the Wall, when done back up to leave, don't turn your back on the Wall) I went forward for a few minutes of prayer. One man questioned me as I came forward, very friendly, asked where I was from, and we chatted about Pittsburgh and the Pirates! – "Are you Jewish?" "No, a Christian pastor, and a friend of Israel." "You are welcome here."

It was very moving. On the way back up to Christ Church, we went by a couple of Sabbath dinners, large celebrations, lengthy meals, all food prepared beforehand. This morning there were more synagogue services, filled with men at prayer, and special meals. The presence of many, many men is very noticeable. Everywhere they lead their families.

I found myself jealous, jealous for the loss of culture that supports our faith and the gospel, jealous for a sane and godly and joyous way to raise children, jealous for the rhythms of life that speak Life, give Life, and celebrate Life that is real Life. Instead we slough through (and too often contribute to) a culture that degrades life and withers the trees and vineyards of the Lord. Recovering a godly culture—wasn't that one of Wilberforce's two great life callings: the abolition of slavery and the "reformation of Manners"? It needs to be done again.

It is now Saturday morning and the synagogue here in the hotel is again at song. We work behind a closed door so as not to offend those celebrating Sabbath.

## **Sunday, June 22: GAFCON 1<sup>st</sup> Day**

GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference) is a response of our churches of the Global South to the innovations and failures of our western churches. If you have not read Bishop Duncan's opening address to GAFCON, you can find it at the following link. It is the best summary of what brings us here I have seen:

<http://www.acn-us.org/etc/2008/anglicanism-come-of-age.pdf>



We have 'Pilgrims' at GAFCON from about 20 nations, including about 290 Anglican Bishops and Archbishops. They lead about 35 million of the Anglican Communion's 78 million members. Many more of the Communion's Bishops are sympathetic to our work here, but not in attendance. The conference has two parts to it; in the past week in Jordan, a smaller group of

Bishops and leaders met for consultation and final conference plans. This week all Pilgrims meet in Jerusalem. I will probably know 150 or so of these people; most will be from Africa, South America and SE Asia – where the heartbeat of biblical, gospel formed Anglicanism is healthy and growing explosively. That region is the future of world Anglicanism.

We started this morning as a team manning the registration tables. It was our task to register 1200 people at some 16 stations, producing photo IDs and distributing conference materials. It was great. We worked from 7am right through to 3pm before most of it was done.

The greatest concern (beside the electricity which failed at one point, shutting down all the computers just as 200 Nigerians came in) was the exhaustion of the Pilgrims as they arrived. Most had been traveling for 24 hours or more, with long waits and no sleep. They were beat, and it became our main concern to love them and welcome them and encourage them while processing them speedily. I think I must have personally registered 30 Nigerian Bishops, often with their wives. We had people from half a dozen African countries, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, South America, and even the USA... it was a great festival of races and peoples and tongues. I probably had a chance to chat with 50 people that I have known, including the Bishops and Archbishops and spouses from Uganda and Rwanda—what a joy to see them again! Pilgrims from Western countries are in the distinct minority here, and it is refreshing. I never did get to church today, and I spent all day in church!

After an afternoon break, I found a longtime friend, Tom Herrick, who is leading the church planting efforts for the Network. We talked for over an hour about planting churches from St Stephen's. I was glad to have the chance for a long talk. Church planting is a major thrust here, and we need to think carefully about that future in our place.

I had dinner with friends: the Jones from Little Rock, John Rodgers, and Georgette Forney. We have two large dining rooms available to us, each seating 500 people. Dinner was served cafeteria style—great offerings of fruits and salads and breads and vegetables and meat and rice and desserts. Lots of time to catch up and say hello to many people as we moved through the lines and the tables. It has been a long time since I was in a conference where the faith of everyone was so evident and overflowing. There was much joy in the room.

The opening worship service was at 8pm, in a room filled to the edges with some 1200 people, including 300 Bishops. It was hymns and Evening Prayer, and a keynote address from the Primate of Nigeria that repeatedly brought us to our feet. His talk was a lengthy history of the events that have brought us to this place. And a call to consider important questions before us. You can find the text at [www.standfirminfaith.com](http://www.standfirminfaith.com) As you read it, imagine 1200 people from all these nations, leaders and servants and believers in Christ listening carefully and responding enthusiastically. We finished with "It is Well with My Soul", loudly sung to the Lord, loudly.

This is a most serious conference, with much at stake, among people who have all been saved by the gospel, among people who have suffered for the gospel, among people who are determined to live their lives for him who gave his life for us. It is a remarkable place and moment. I ask your continued prayers!

Tomorrow morning we are going (all 1200 of us!!!) to the Mount of Olives for the morning.

## **Monday, June 23: GAFCON 2<sup>nd</sup> Day**

We headed out early to the Mt of Olives, about 7:30. All 1200 of us! Just think about the logistics behind that—and somehow it worked. Standing there in the hot morning sun, singing, listening to an introduction to the city of Jerusalem, praying... Then there were photographs from a circling helicopter, first of the whole group, then of the Bishops, and then we broke into smaller groups and headed down the Mountain to the site of Gethsemane and the church of All Nations, that place where Jesus was squeezed out in prayer on the night before his crucifixion. It was all quite a moment. Our small group decided to walk back through the Old City rather than take the busses back. We went up into the Old City through the Lion's Gate—also known as St Stephen's gate, the traditional place where Stephen was martyred, outside the walls, within site of the Mt of Olives—the place where the Messiah is supposed to return.

We stopped by St. Anne's Church, where the Pool of Bethesda was in the time of Jesus, now filled with beautiful gardens and lemon trees. Time to pause and cool off in the shade.



We went on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, slowly walking past the place of Jesus' crucifixion, the place he was taken down and laid out, and perhaps the place where he was buried. It is an Orthodox church, filled with old columns and dark corridors and devotional lamps. There was Divine Liturgy being offered at the site of the tomb. I stopped in a small empty stone side chapel and listened and sung along with the chanted psalms. So much to think about... We came back up through the Christian Quarter Road to David Street and all the shops in the souk (a street filled with side shops).

Up at the Jaffa Gate we stopped by Christ Church for a tour and drinks and rest. I have run into Linda Cohen several times—wonderful to see her, and she seems to be doing great work at Christ Church with CMJ. We caught cabs back to the hotel in time for lunch. I sat with the Leightons from

Connecticut, long time friends, and with Archbishop Orambi from Uganda. He is a wonderful man. We had a long conversation about the Communion and the conference. It was very encouraging. I invited him to Pittsburgh and the Seminary and St. Stephen's when he is in the States next year. We shall see.

At 2pm there was the opening Eucharist to the conference, with Archbishop Orambi speaking from John 5 (healing at Bethsaida), "Jesus is Lord" — "I am asking you to be a church that obeys the Lord. Listen to the healer. Do not disobey the healer." Wonderful worship to a Kenyan liturgy, great enthusiasm, strong singing, deep joy. Exhausted, I went back to my room for an hour nap.

By 5pm I was back in the conference to hear Os Guinness speak on the "8 Challenges of Modernity". Among them, "Modernity makes evangelism easier but discipleship harder (because of the shift from 'authority' to 'this is my preference')" and "The oddities of communication" (including inflation of language and inattention coming from the fact that everyone is speaking and no one is listening). "Deep listening is the rarest of gifts".

After dinner I headed back to sort it out and think and pray.

## **Tuesday, June 24: GAFCON 3<sup>rd</sup> Day**

We started the day with worship, with the Primate of West Africa speaking on Genesis 12 and the Bible (the Book that reads me)—the "I wills" of the covenant with Abraham: "I will bless you... give you the land... make you a people... make your name great... be with you..." Speaking of Abraham's lies about Sarah, he said, "Learn to tell the truth and rely on God for his protection."

After that I had signed up for the "Anglican Identity Workshop", filled with a couple hundred people. We listened to two lectures, one on the linkage of Scripture to our core values by Ashley Null, and the other by Andrew Shead on the effect of the Modern Period. Excellent presentations on the essential and substantial place of Scripture and the core events of the gospel to the identity of Anglicanism.



After the presentations we broke into prearranged small groups for an hour of discussion and feedback. In my group were 2 other pastors from the US, 3 Nigerian Bishops, a Southeast Asia Bishop and an Aussie pastor. Great group! The conversation was immediately vigorous and challenging.

After lunch, I took off for the Old City with 6 friends. We walked down from the Jaffa Gate through

the souk, slowly visiting shops, and finding our way to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre again, where I showed them what had been shown to me. We stopped afterwards for drinks, and then went to the Western Wall, where I placed prayer cards in the wall with the names of each of my family, and of my friend Dick Spatz, recently passed away. It was again a meaningful time of prayer. I read the Benedictus there. We came back up through the Armenian and Jewish Quarters to the Jaffa Gate and a cab home.

Michael Nazar-Ali, Bishop of Rochester of England spoke at 5pm on "The Future of Anglicanism". "The Future of Anglicanism is linked to the authentic nature of Anglicanism." The instruments of our unity have failed under the pressure of western modernity, he said. What is needed? "A confessing church, a conciliar church, and a consistory church" (consistent with the heritage of the past). After the lecture and Q&A, we went back into the same small groups for more vigorous discussion and feedback from each group to the conference leadership. Then, for 45 minutes before dinner we met in provincial groups, where we talked again about what we hope will come from GAFCON. All this was fed back to the drafting and leadership committees.

I had dinner with Greg Brewer (Good Samaritan, Paoli) where we got off alone and talked everything through. And caught up on what God has been doing with us. And then in the early evening the Common Cause, our provincial group met with the Southern Cone provincial group to talk about our future together over the next years.

It has been a very substantive conference so far, all within the backdrop of Jerusalem, which is speaking as loudly as any of the other voices. It is a profound experience, making an impact on us all. There is no doubt that the Lord's hands are upon these days, shaping us all and giving us new friendships, common vision, and preparation for the coming years. Please pray for these days!

### **Wednesday, June 25: GAFCON 4<sup>th</sup> Day**

Morning Worship featured David Short today, speaking from Exodus 24 on the meaning of salvation. He is a Rector in B.C. Canada, leading a parish very much like St. Stephen's out of an extremely hostile diocese.

After that I went to my small group again. We are holding together better and better through these discussions, across differences in nationality and culture. Our workshop is on Anglican Identity, where we heard Ashley Null on the "Decay of Anglicanism," and a speaker from Uganda Christian University on the East African Revival. He spoke on the themes of the Revival: walking in the light; conversion and repentance; disciplines of discipleship; contentment and generosity; shun evil in all its forms and listen to scripture; shared ministry for everyone (every believer carries his/her Bible everywhere, and was always ready to testify to the Lord).

Wednesday afternoon I went to the Ophel Gardens on the south wall of the Temple Mount where we ascended the steps to the Temple, with all 1200 of us present for teaching and singing and praise and prayer—and then photos by groups. The place is beautiful, and the immensity of the Temple Mount is almost overwhelming, even in

ruins. This was the largest Temple in the ancient world. At the time of Jesus, the architecture of the Holy Land, being built by Herod, rivaled that of Rome. Which is one of the reasons the Romans destroyed it with a vengeance—just three years after it was completed!



We were on the Temple steps that Jesus ascended and this was the likely place where 3000 people were baptized on the day of Pentecost (in the purification baths). These were the places and the gates where so many of the Gospel events happened. It was a powerful time, a pentecostal time of renewal and recommitment. One of the speakers told of how in prayer he had heard the lions of Africa roar, and seen the tigers of Asia prowl, and then flocks of birds migrating from America, "but not for

long—and the Lord himself will be your shelter..."

In the evening I went to dinner with David Pilaggi, the new Rector of Christ Church Jerusalem. He has been in the Holy Land for 28 years, and has recently moved into these responsibilities. We talked at great length about the Sabbath, about the crazy western culture, and about what it means to 'sanctify time'. I was particularly interested in what he thought might fit inside the life of an evangelical congregation. It was a very helpful conversation, and gave me some good ideas on how to proceed with the development of discipleship and spiritual formation process in our parish. I am actually looking forward to the start of Sabbath tomorrow night.

### **Thursday, 26: GAFCON 5<sup>th</sup> Day**

This morning we heard exposition on 2 Samuel 7 by Vaughn Roberts, a Rector in Oxford. Again, very solid presentations of the scope of redemption. And the Mothers' Union of Nigeria sang for us. Everyone was on their feet, cheering and clapping!! Vaughn spoke about the King, how he is chosen by God and descended from David and enthroned forever.

After our small group, we heard presentations in the Anglican Identity workshop from Steve Noll and John Rodgers. They were great, and addressed questions of whether the Communion should be confessional or conciliar or both, about church discipline, about the essentials of the Anglican Movement, and about where we go from here. Again, the papers will be posted on the internet long before I arrive home, and are well worth a careful read. There is great unity developing on our path forward—but important questions remain.

The solid teaching, and the personal conversations with so very many people of different backgrounds, and the city of Jerusalem—all together make a fertile and rich mixture where God's voice is powerfully speaking.



This afternoon, I went with 10 people and Jack Gabig (who led us) on a long walk through Old Jerusalem (again). We retraced the likely steps of Jesus on his last days, starting at David's tomb, then going from the upper room (or one like it), to Gethsemane, to the place of his trial, to the place of his imprisonment, to the place of his execution. In every place we stopped for prayer and Bible reading, and often took in the major moments of Old Testament events that would have been in sight (like the tomb of

Absalom as we walked across the Kidron Valley to Gethsemane). We also stopped at the Lion Gate (otherwise known as St. Stephen's gate) where we marked his martyrdom and read his story. It was a good, long, three hour prayer walk. We ended up with a long dinner at the Armenian Tavern (great food) and then I caught a cab home.

I am compiling more notes of the things that God is speaking to us, which I will try and post this weekend. But right now, I am exhausted. Time for some sleep.

## **Friday, June 27: GAFCON Statement Drafting**

Friday was almost all given to the draft of our statement. We are not allowed to speak of details because the drafting process is still going on, but it was as encouraging a moment as I have had in many, many years of this battle. The process of drafting was awkward (with 1200 people involved), but was a genuine attempt to once again get feedback and input from every Pilgrim. We broke up into provisional groups (ours was the Common Cause provincial group) and read the draft through paragraph by paragraph. Comments ranged from punctuation corrections to far more substantive issues. The final draft will be released by Sunday morning.

Tomorrow is a full day off for me. GAFCON goes up to Galilee, and I have already been, so I get a Sabbath. Time to think and ponder and write and pray. I am so glad for a day where I am not scheduled to do anything. It will be the first. And then on Sunday night I start my way home. I am so eager to come home! I thought that perhaps I should have left early today (as I had tomorrow off...) but after the drafting process, I am so glad to have been here. When you see the statement, you will understand.

## Saturday, June 28: GAFCON Sabbath

Well, my day off was remarkable. I wanted to get away for a day to have a Sabbath, to think and pray and write and listen, in the presence of the Lord. I decided to go off to Ein Kerem, about 4 miles away from here (recommended by Linda Cohen and Marcia and Neil Lebar). It is the traditional place of John the Baptist's birth, a small, out of the way town where I thought I might spend the day. Our guidebook also had good things to say. So... at 10am I took a taxi (he said, "how are you going to get back? There are no taxis in this town!") down to Ein Karem and started to explore.

I went to two Franciscan Churches that were dedicated to 'The Visitation' of Mary and Elizabeth. I prayed the Benedictus and the Magnificat there. I have loved praying those prayers in Israel—at the Wall and elsewhere. They have a fullness here I have never known. The churches were so Marian as to make me uncomfortable, though, so I kept walking after a while. After walking all over the small town, I stopped to get my first fresh squeezed orange juice, which I loved!!

I decided to find a trail mentioned in the guidebook at the entrance to Yad Vashem (the Holocaust memorial, which was closed on the Sabbath), which would have been a two-mile walk uphill along the road back to Jerusalem. I started, but quickly got hot, had no extra water, and decided to turn back. Hmm. What to do?



Get an espresso and a water bottle, that's what! I slowed down and enjoyed the espresso, and thought some more. I decided to get some lunch (it was about 12:45 by this time) in one of the three restaurants in town. I went in (searched and scanned by an armed guard on the way in!) and went up to a third floor balcony and found a small table in the shade. I ordered water and a pizza-sized plate of warm, thin, fresh baked pita bread with eggplant, and four spreads. It was an explosion of tastes

and smells, one of the best meals I'd ever had, rivaling our best Ireland meals! I so wish Bec was here to share it with me!!!

I read all my GAFCON notes through, making extra notes and references, thinking about what was important, and outlining thoughts while I slowly ate. By 2pm I was done (my Cate would have called me a 'camper' for staying that long) and ready to try and get to the forest trail at Yad Vashem. I found a cab (yea!) that dropped me off up the hill at exactly the right place. Below the access road to the memorial was a public park that looked like wandering trails through a descending pine forest.

Down I went, quickly the only person around. I walked about two miles all over the hill, stopping a couple of times to rest and look and take some pictures. I found my way to the gate of the memorial, which was closed, but which was a bracing piece of art.



Then I went up above the access road and wandered into what turned out to be Israel's National burial ground (like Arlington). It was beautiful, and deserted. There were acres of graves—Golda Meir, Rabin's, etc. Every Prime Minister or cabinet member or national hero is buried there, and it is beautifully laid out in a pine forest of old and young trees, flowering bushes, and winding pathways. There was a large memorial to all people killed by terrorists, reminding me of our Vietnam Memorial.

There were also acres with no graves, many benches, and large trees and flowering bushes. I found a peaceful place and sat down. By this time it was almost 3pm, and I stayed till 8pm. Eventually about 20 families came through the park, most with children, all dressed for Shabbat.

I didn't have my Bible with me, but had my new Prayer Book (AMiA's modernized 1662 version), and ended up reading slowly through the catechism and Athanasian Creed. My little pine grove quickly became something of a sanctuary.

I spent hours looking at the trees and bushes and cones and needles. Thinking.



There was something of a concert going on. The wind would rush through the trees every half-minute or so. There were several birds I got to know. A child would yell out. The pines would lift their branches in the winds as if in praise to the Lord. The bright hot sun would play off the branches and shadows would dance along the needled floor of the park. Birds would call—and the sounds and sights would be coming in sequence from all directions, as if being called forth by the unseen Conductor of the Sabbath Concert. Two older men on a bench were talking about their open Torah. An empty wheelchair spoke of hope and love, as an elderly couple walked slowly by. An Israeli flag stood proud

in the wind, almost hidden by pines. I could hear the older man turn the pages of his Torah. The winds rushed again.

The old pines, tortured by generations of heat and sun and wind are yet green all over the outside, as if dressed in a jacket of life. Close to the trunk of the trees large branches were broken and hanging and long dead—but so full of cones, little fat Christmas tree shaped cones that you could hardly see through them. The cones on the dead branches seemed to mirror the graves throughout the park—sleepers all, seeds all, waiting a higher call to come forth in life. Sabbath all around.

By 6pm the sun began to relent. Families began to come out of the shade and walk around. Squirrels that had been quiet all afternoon began to chatter. Doves cooed, and a crow cawed. The earth seemed sacred and at peace. You could almost hear His voice, the Lord of the Sabbath, "Come to me, you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

By 7pm I had been there almost five hours. This day I had no meetings, no deadlines, no appointments, no homework, and no responsibilities. I started out in the morning not knowing where I was going, nor knowing what I would find. But at every turn the day opened before me, unfolding one delight after another until the pines and the winds and the children began to speak more and more deeply. I found myself attentive and alert and listening keenly all through it—and at rest before the Lord. Every hour I was almost ready to rise and leave, and He whispered, "Wait with me another hour. There is more." Everything whispered to me of Him. Everything.

I decided to read Evening Prayer, slowly, in my little pine chapel. By now, people had left, and I was alone again in the park, almost. In the middle of the general intercession, "We commend to your fatherly goodness all who are in any way afflicted or distressed..." I began to weep. For my family. For my parish. For our Communion. For myself. I just started to weep before the Lord. For the kind of dad and friend and pastor I have not been. For wanting to be someone important. For taking so many gifts from the Lord of all gifts—and looking upon them lightly. I was all at once so very, very sorry, weeping before the Lord, begging him for us all, broken by mercy. I read through the Great Litany, slowly.

It was time to get home; darkness was descending. I walked about 2.5 miles home, arriving about 8:30 in the dark. This day was long, long overdue.

## **Sunday, June 29: GAFCON Last Day**

This morning, in the midst of 4+ hours of worship, the final draft of our statement was released to great waves of celebration and hops and joy. It was a breathtaking moment. No hint of triumphalism, but a widely shared sense that we stand on holy ground, and that the Lord has heard our call and has risen. A sense that something evil has broken. That a new and hopeful day is at hand. We finish by 1pm, and late in the day, after many, many hugs and affectionate conversations, many, many expressions of hope and resolute partnership, I begin my long journey home. How eager I am to see you all, and for the days ahead.

## **What Was Accomplished at GAFCON?**

What has happened these weeks? Well, we took counsel together, with ears open to the Lord; we formed many new friendships; we were richly encouraged in our faith; we reaffirmed the core of our faith; and we spend days walking slowly through the places where Jesus himself walked and lived, ministered and died and rose... It was wonderful, and I carried you on my heart as I went.

More than this, I think we will see in the years ahead that God has moved at GAFCON to:

1. Launch of a Confessional and Conciliar Movement within Anglicanism. These, we believe, are fundamental remedies for our Communion, addressing and healing the failures of Anglicanism over the past decades. The encouragement of the biblical churches will be immense.
2. Draft and affirm of a core set of doctrinal and moral values (the Jerusalem Declaration) as the basis for our fellowship.
3. Affirm a Council of confessing Primates, and a conciliar process to guide the movement.
4. Call for all Anglicans to affirm these standards as a basis for fellowship. The authority of leaders and councils who are not willing to join us in these affirmations and who hold to a false gospel has been rejected.
5. Ask for the affirmation and recognition of a new Province in North America by the Council of Primates, consisting of all who are able to join in our common affirmations and gospel mission. For the first time, evangelical Anglicans in the West are under godly primatial leadership, clear biblical doctrine, and sound moral guidelines.
6. Breach the wall of western hostility to the Gospel. What happened at GAFCON will reverberate across Anglicanism, across the mainline denominations, and across western secular culture. A hostile spiritual stronghold has been broken.

I cannot adequately tell you of my own encouragement and of my hope for the days ahead. A great door has opened in front of us. There will be opposition all around, but the way forward is clear and ready.

GAFCON talks, statements, and reports can be found here: <http://www.gafcon.org/>