

Genesis tells us that Abraham and Sarah were in their tent “by the oaks of Mamre” (genesis 18:1-15). Three men visited them and Abraham offered them hospitality, water to wash their feet and bread from the finest flour.

Preparing for this day I was reading many references about the text and I encountered many scholars talking about the Trinity and how this is so significant for Christians and also the importance of Abraham and his descendants. Then, I asked myself should I base my sermon on these themes. Probably thousands of pages throughout history have been written and who I am to add something about this?. I don't possess formal theological training, but for me reading the bible without placing the text in a certain context has never worked. Immediately I transferred the text into what was happening right now, what the text has to tell me and how this is calling me to discern and discuss.

I didn't choose this bible passage; it was left from the previous speakers. It was the first time I paid attention to the name of trees mentioned in the bible. Especially this one you can encounter how its been named by several authors with different names. It have been called, the Oak grove, the wood of Mamre, the oak of Sibta, the sacred tree, the oak of Abraham. It is believed that this tree is located near Hebron, Palestine territories.

When I started researching more about this tree I found out all the history around itself, and how it's placed in a region in turmoil. Again I was asking myself the question, what am I going to say. I pictured this oak being a big tree, under his branches people were invited to rest. When Abraham invited the three men or angels to rest, this was an invitation of hospitality, you were more than welcome.

Now in this region two nations are disputing the land and where these trees, amongst other things grow. The Palestinian people have been encountering years of persecution, humiliation, displacement,

harassment, and disproportional reaction from the Israeli army. Yet, they are still surviving, hoping and praying for their nation and the right to the land to be recognized.

Many voices from the Israeli people call to the end of this unjust conflict. They have been asking for a peaceful resolution, the cohabitation of the two nations, recognizing each other, as neighbours. Extending the invitation of hospitality under one big Oak tree.

My predecessors from other Sundays have talked about the benefits of the trees, how wonderful are they, their fruits and flowers. In the lecture from Today Genesis 18: 1 to 15, we could picture the image of these three men resting from an arduous walk under the sun, and how marvelous it was to hear someone to invite you to put yourself under this big tree. You are now under this tree's protection, the breeze calming your body from the heat, the greens of the leaves. How robust was the trunk that you could feel protected.

Stretching this image, we as Mennonites are invited to look for a new picture, where these two nations would be under the protection of the Oak of Abraham, under the same shade, sharing the fruits of the land and the happiness of their children.

We, as Mennonites are called to speak loudly against the new direction that this government is given to the aid of many Palestinian refugees.

I want to explain myself...

On August 6, 2015 an article by Sara Roy published in The Nation, title "The Gaza Strip's Last Safety Net is in Danger the UN's refugee agency is one of the few forces standing between the people of Gaza and humanitarian catastrophe"

In this article, she describes how after almost 50 years of blockade by Israel into this tiny territory that hold 2 millions on inhabitants is closed to a humanitarian catastrophe.

The World Bank report on May 2015, states that over 60 percent of Youth in Gaza are unemployed, practically 40 percent live below the poverty line, and there is not clean water, irregular periods of electricity is offered an not service of sewage at all.

UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (UNRWA) was established in 1949 by UN General Assembly after the Arab-Israeli conflict. This Agency is in charge of providing aid to 5.2 million Palestinian refugees, particularly, in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Most of these refugees were born in camps and now their children are too. Imagine your whole life in a camp, in countries where you are not allow to work, where you are considered as not welcomed. This crisis has been going to long, and this is the result of a political failure.

Now, imagine your only form of survival is throughout an Agency that needs to operate with an annual budget of \$1.4 billion. The UNRWA provides healthcare, education, social services, emergency aid and infrastructure. This relief agency it is a bastion, a pillar for the survival of people of Gaza, yet have been confronting with the reality of funds been cut.

Starting in 2008 Canada impose a series of cuts to this relief agency, that were incremented year by year until the year 2013 that decided completely to withdrew all money. Since the conflict starting in Syria many Palestinians refugees were again displaced and many have to flee to Lebanon. This are the most affected by the cuts that this UN's agency is obligated to do. There is not extra money, period.

Who are the most vulnerable of all this political manoeuvres?, without doubt children. Again I ask myself why the Government of Canada,

doesn't want to share the responsibility in helping these refugees. Is there a hidden agenda?

We should all work towards a more inclusive world were together with our neighbours could share the big Oak tree of Abraham.