

### **Intro:**

My handy *Penguin Pocket Book of Facts* has a useful page that lists the technical names for about 130 different fears. It’s certainly been a bad week for the people in East Coast or Midwest even in this month of April if they suffer from kristallophobia, chionophobia or cheimaphobia. That’s fear of ice, fear of snow and fear of cold. And watch out on Friday in May if you have triskaidecaphobia: fear of the number 13. Also listed are chrematophobia (fear of money), linonophobia (fear of string), nephophobia (fear of clouds), and homophobia (fear of homosexuals). And if you suffer from phobophobia, fear of fears, I’m sorry: you must be terrified now!

Apparently, people fear all kinds of strange things. But what do *you* fear? What are your greatest, deepest, most horrifying fears? Fear of loss? Fear of losing *something* or *someone*? Fear of the future? Fear of humiliation or failure? Fear of God’s judgment? Fear of death? What do you fear?

While organizing the Holy Land Trip this year, we dealt with fear due to the uncertain political climate in the Holy Land. We started with 35 people going, but at the end we had 13 people—Sunny with 12 disciples ☺ Today we will share how our concerning heart toward ourselves and the people in the Holy Land turned into friendship through our journey. We will share our experience with three difference voices for three different parts of our journey: West Bank (Bethlehem), Israel (Jerusalem), and Jordan. Let us hear.

- **West Bank (Bethlehem)→ Dave Coombs**

### The West Bank

Those of us on the trip had heard of the West Bank, but we soon discovered that we knew virtually nothing about it. In 1948 the West Bank became part of Jordan and more than 1 million refugees flooded into the area from the new state of Israel. Most of them had been forced out and their villages flattened. In 1967 Israel took the West Bank back during the Six Day War. The 1993 Oslo Accords gave the Palestinian Authority back some control and autonomy but today more than 60% of the West Bank is under Israeli security control. There are more than 2.7 million

Palestinians living in the West Bank and almost 400,000 Israelis living in illegal settlements, according to the U.N.

Bethlehem, Jericho, the baptism sites of John the Baptist and Jesus, and Qumran, site of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and one of Herod the Great's palaces are all in the West Bank. We travelled to these places and never felt unsafe. We visited the traditional sites of Jesus birth (the Church of the Nativity) and where the angel visited the shepherds, according to Luke. Wherever there was an important site related to the story of Jesus, Christians have built a church. There is an aura of history and mystery in all of these places.

What the group learned was that Palestinian Christians and Muslims get along just fine. We had carried overseas the election baggage and rhetoric that demonized Muslims. Yet in the Hope Secondary School supported by the Methodist Church Christian and Muslim youth attend the school together. Bethlehem University is 30% Christian and 70% Muslim. The students we met were engaging, hopeful and resourceful. One was living in a refugee camp. I had a mental picture of people living in tents. The refugee camp consists of modern structures, a playground and a cemetery. Above the entrance is a large key, symbolizing the key that each refugee carried from his house when they left Israel after 1948. They all intend to return.

We visited Wadi Foquin which we and the Methodist church in Alameda support. Wadi means valley and it is located in a pretty spring fed valley. Above it on the two ridgelines stand illegal Israeli settlements. The Israel military has announced the soccer field built by the Methodist Global Ministries is an illegal structure and they intended to build a wall down the middle of it.

We asked about the "One-state" versus the "Two-state" solutions. I was left with the impression that the One-state solution will never happen and the Two-state solution of Israel and the separate country of Palestine existing side by side will not happen in my lifetime.

Yet through this lens of hope, missed opportunities and failed policies we saw that Muslims and Christians live in peace in this area—the area where the Prince of Peace walked 2,000 years ago.

- **Israel (Jerusalem)→ Joy Hamilton**

Hello, I am Joy Hamilton and I had the honor and privilege of joining 12 members of SRVUMC on their pilgrimage to the Holy Land!

We walked on sacred ground in and around Jerusalem—we walked in the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives where Jesus went to pray the night before his crucifixion while his disciples slept, we visited the area where Peter denied Jesus and Judas betrayed him with a kiss, we visited the Upper Room where Jesus shared his final meal with his disciples and washed their feet, we viewed the cave where Jesus was likely tortured before being sent to his death, we walked the Via Dolorosa and the stations of the cross where Jesus carried his own cross to the crucifixion site, we went to 2 different places that claim to be where Jesus was entombed (The Garden Tomb and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre). At each site we experienced a sacred moment knowing that we walked in or near where Jesus walked. It felt like hallowed ground and very real.

We shared holy moments—we had communion with our group at both the Garden Tomb and on a small boat on the Sea of Galilee, we rededicated our baptism by anointing each other at the River Jordan, we joined in a circle and raised our voices in a church with startling acoustics and sang a spine tingling rendition of Amazing Grace, we became the living history of the disciples of Jesus and we made lasting and unlikely friendships—even without guide, Ata, a Palestinian Muslim.

But most moving for me was my connection with Mary. As a young woman, with a pretty amazing story, prepared to give birth to God's son we follow her journey. I can't help but think that is every woman's journey into giving birth. Don't get me wrong, I know how my 2 children were conceived but I also know both were (and are) a miracle. As I carried a life inside my body I knew I would be forever changed—and when I held my newborn I had a “god” moment. Having a child is no ordinary event and I believe every mother feels just like Mary did—blessed, honored, scared, and humbled. Each child, every one of you, is born of God and has the same opportunity to live in God's image and do God's work. God sent us his son and gave us an example to follow. You are all God's miracles and you are all born with the potential to do great good and live Jesus inspired lives—don't waste a second—go out and be a disciple of Jesus in all you do!

Thank you to my dear friends for including me in a journey of a lifetime—we are forever friends with a unique bond that I will cherish always.

- **Jordan→ Bill Rust**

Give hospitality to the stranger, for you, too, were once a stranger. Jordan is giving hospitality to strangers, as we saw.

Jordan lives in a rough neighborhood. Its neighbors are Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel.

It is a welcome refuge from the fighting in nearby Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. We heard that Jordan's own population is seven million. About half are Jordanians of Palestinian origin, that is, Palestinians who fled when Palestine became Israel in 1948 or since. In addition, our guide said, Jordan now cares for about three million refugees; about half of whom are from Syria. In Amman, a modern city of 3,000,000, we drove through a refugee camp with 126,000 refugee residents. It has become an established, high-density neighborhood with unplanned permanent buildings and an informal business district with open front shops.

The high percentage of refugees is straining the social services in Jordan. Unemployment is higher as refugees seek to assimilate. The United Nations helps. The United States gives money. Our United Methodist Committee on Relief provides humanitarian supplies along with many other cooperating charities. Jordan indeed is offering hospitality to strangers.

Surprisingly, most of the biblical Old Testament story happened in Jordan, not Israel. We saw the biblical Jabbok River, north of Amman. At the Jabbok, Jacob wrestled at night with "a man" (perhaps God), who blessed him and renamed him "Israel." Very special for me.

Later, Moses led the wandering Israelites out of Egypt and into Transjordan (now Jordan), east of the Jordan River. Moses took them northward from the desert south to the fertile hill country of Amman.

From "at or near" Mt. Nebo, about 25 miles southwest of Amman, Moses looked west on the Promised Land, and so did we. Canaan, the biblical Promised Land, lies west of the Jordan River. We saw what Moses saw: the Jordan River; Jericho; the hill country of Samaria; the hill country of Galilee; the Dead Sea. On a clearer day, we might have seen Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the hill country far to the west.

Gentle camels were everywhere. We imagined camel caravans on the silk road. Camels can travel eight days without water and can carry up to 1,000 pounds!

Petra, the city of buildings carved into stone cliff faces, is a UNESCO world heritage site. It was well worth the 3 and 1/2 hour trip from Amman on a washboard highway in a small, well-used van with no shock absorbers. (The contrast with Israel's smooth roads and our full-size tourist bus was, well, shocking!) An unarmed Tourist Policeman traveling with us was particularly helpful in getting us quickly through the many security checkpoints when our van was flagged over for inspection.

Bedouin camps and shepherds with their sheep were everywhere. When the shepherds called, the sheep ran to their shepherds. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, means more to me now. If we're a part of his flock, we recognize and answer his call.

Jordan's lesson: Give hospitality to the stranger, for some in doing so have entertained angels without knowing it. AMEN

**Conclusion:**

From America to Bethlehem, from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, from Jerusalem to Jordan, and now we are back to America from there. It has been a long journey physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And yet, we had a transformational experience with the people of the Holy Land like Apostle Paul.

We, the thirteen who went to the Holy Land, became friends to each other and to the people in the Holy Land. We are inviting you to become a friend to those who live in fear and darkness, especially those people in the Holy Land and refugees. We've got new friends through this trip. We hope that you will explore a possibility to get a new friend in the Holy Land also. Let us enlarge our circle of friendship by inviting strangers to be our friends in God's love. We've got a friend! Amen.