

# Message from Bishop Rachel

## 20 May 2025



As I seek to engage with the horror and pain of all that continues to unfold in Gaza, I am angered and deeply perturbed by the obliteration of human life and disregard of the dignity of every human being, each created in the image of God.

Hamas' brutal attack, killing and violation of the lives of Jewish people in Southern Israel on 7 October 2023, is to be condemned with no 'buts' in the sentence. The same is true of attacks and demeaning words aimed at Jewish people across communities, campuses and homes here in the UK. There is no place for anti-Jewish rhetoric or action, and I have deeply valued conversation with Jewish peers, the Israeli embassy and families of hostages; and I treasure the relationships I have here with Jewish brothers and sisters. I will continue to be strident about the need for all hostages to be released, and to condemn anti-Jewish rhetoric or action. It is abhorrent.

There is also no place for the horrific killing and destruction of Gaza as the Palestinian population is inhumanely starved of aid and civilians of all ages are brutally attacked, maimed and killed, even in hospitals, through the powerful action of the Israeli government.

As international condemnation and pleas for justice and action, seem to be continually ignored, my tears are those of despair, helplessness and anger. Furthermore, I feel deep frustration with the binary attitudes and rhetoric in the catastrophic unfolding of devastation, and people's inability to put sanctity of life and human dignity at the centre.

I have been shocked how, even on the floor of the chamber in the House of Lords, calls for humanitarian aid and condemnation of the Israeli government's sustained attack on Gaza, have often been falsely heard as pro-Hamas and anti-Jewish. I utterly condemn the action of Hamas and their disregard for the sanctity of the life of every person. I utterly condemn the inhumane holding of hostages. I also utterly condemn the action of the Israeli government in Gaza.

As I have emphasised before, for me this is not about being 'pro' one community with disregard for another. It is about being pro human dignity and worth, rooted in the love, grace and mercy of God, who calls us into being. I am 'anti' the misuse of power and an arrogant disregard for the needs and hopes of the 'other', and a desire to diminish and seemingly obliterate a whole people.

When we fail to see the 'other' as a unique and precious human being to whom I am connected because of who God is and who we have been created to be, then I begin to turn my back on God and distance myself from Jesus Christ.

There is nothing warm and fluffy about this. It takes us to places of deep tension, anguish, and an ever-deeper recognition of the fractures within ourselves, relationships and our world. We cannot run away from it or choose to ignore unjust behaviour and evil where we see it.

This engagement with the mess and horror of humanity's lives and actions which mar the image of God, is something I also continue to grapple with in the sphere of criminal justice in my role as Anglican Bishop for prisons, as I continue to reflect on what it means to seek and restore the face of God in both offender and victim, and what that means for justice and mercy.

This brings me back to the Holy Land and an upcoming exhibition being hosted by Tewkesbury Abbey: '[50 Faces of the Holy Land](#)' between Monday 2 June and Sunday 15 June. This is a photographic exhibition organised by the charity, Friends of the Holy Land, highlighting and promoting the lives of people in Israel, Gaza and Palestine. Each face tells a story.

I am reminded of the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis. There is not space here to comment on the deep division within that family, Jacob's manipulation and deception, and his pride and arrogance in seeking to control God's promises and purposes. In Genesis 27-28 we have seen Jacob fleeing the fury of his brother and failing to face up to the mess and pain. It is some time after this, after further twists and turns in the story of discord, manipulation and deception, that Jacob and Esau meet. Jacob approaches the encounter with deep fear of being killed, and we see him crying out to God in recognition of his own failure and unworthiness (Genesis 32:9-12) and then comes the familiar episode of Jacob wrestling with God.

Soon after, Jacob sees Esau ahead coming towards him with 400 men, and he is terrified, '*But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept*' (Genesis 33:4), and then come those beautiful words of Jacob '*for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God.*' (Genesis 33:10). And how I cry out for such revelation in those meting out destruction on the Palestinian people; and members of Hamas holding hostages in the tunnels of Gaza; and indeed, in so many situations of conflict across our world.

Today resources have been released encouraging people to pray and [Fast For Gaza — Embrace the Middle East](#). I am delighted that Embrace Middle East (for whom I am privileged to be a patron) are taking a lead. For those who participate in this, may we humble ourselves before God, seeking the face of God, crying out for an end to the annihilation of adults and children; and praying for a miracle of reconciliation in which people of different races, backgrounds and story recognise the face of God in one another.

God willing, I will be travelling to Israel-Palestine for a few days next weekend, meeting with Christian brothers and sisters to hear the reality of life for them in the present, to pray with them, and to seek God's face together. I then look forward to visiting the exhibition at Tewkesbury Abbey.

This comes with my thanks and prayers as ever,

+ Rachel