

Examples of Cruciformity

20. Jack Sara

"Jack Sara ... From Prison to Pastor" as told to Julia Fisher¹

Jack Sara's story is copied from the website of The Olive Tree Reconciliation Fund:²

Jack was born into an orthodox Catholic family in the Old City and went to the Lutheran School there. In 1988 when he was just thirteen years old, he was picked up by the Israeli police.

"I was walking to a shop to buy something for the house and suddenly I was picked up by Israeli soldiers. They took me to the police station, beat me up and accused me of throwing stones even though I didn't do it. A little while later, it happened again and that time I spent the night in a police cell." This started to shape Jack's thinking.

"Because they did this to me, I found myself wanting revenge. I joined the Palestinian Communist Party and became a leader here in the Old City. Whilst it was one of the more 'peaceful' Palestinian groups, nevertheless they were involved in demonstrations and writing graffiti and doing many things in support of our demands for our own Palestinian State. Before I was beaten up by the Israeli soldiers, I would never have imagined myself being involved in a political movement; but now I felt I had no option. I was suffering. My people were suffering."

Jack was in High School during this time. His ambition was to become a musician. After he'd served several sentences in Israeli prisons he decided he wanted to be out of this political activity.

"The last time I was in prison, I was there for three months. The Gulf War was going on and I remember seeing the bombs coming over and landing in Israel. I decided I needed transformation in my life. I wanted to help my people but I realised I wasn't helping them by throwing stones. I thought that if I became a social worker that would be more useful. I left prison, left High School, got involved in bad things like smoking and taking drugs all the time knowing I needed change in my life."

Change was just around the corner for Jack. His parents moved to another house and their neighbour was a Christian.

"I realised he led a very different life to me," Jack explained, "he was a young guy but he didn't do the sort of things I did. He went to different places; he went to church, he did good things. So I decided I needed to ask this guy what made him different. He invited me to talk with him and another guy – both were leaders in an evangelical church in the Old City. They explained the Gospel to me clearly and I prayed and committed my life to the Lord. That was August 10th, 1991."

¹ <http://www.olivetreefund.org/jack-sara-from-prison-to-pastor.php>

² Their vision: "To build bridges of understanding and support, in a spirit of reconciliation, between believers (both Jewish and Arab) in the Holy Land (Israel and the Palestinian Areas) and Christians worldwide."

Jack started to change, but it was a slow process.

“The first year was hard because of my background. After three months I enrolled in Bible School still thinking that I could become a social worker or a teacher and in that way help my people.”

Whilst at Bible College, Jack met Salim Munayer, a Palestinian Christian involved in reconciliation between Jews and Arabs and founder of Musalaha.

“Salim was one of my teachers at college. In October 1991 he invited me to go on a trip into the desert. He mentioned something about going with Messianic believers. At that time I didn't know that Messianic believers were Jews living in the country. It was a new experience for me. I had so many memories of Israelis beating me and hating me but here I was meeting people who loved the same Lord that I loved. They were, like me, wanting to serve the Lord and I found I was starting to be healed from feelings of hatred and revenge that had gripped me. I knew that as a Christian it was wrong to hate, but I still had the memories of what had happened to me. But then I repented of the negative feelings I had towards the Jewish believers I was with. I was determined to seek the way of the Lord even though it was hard. I had to work through those issues and give those feelings to the Lord and ask Him to heal and work through the pain.”

During that interview ten years ago, I asked Jack how important he believed reconciliation between Jewish and Arab believers was for the future of the Body of Christ in Israel.

“It's just as Jesus said, the world cannot bring peace, but He can. If it is the same Lord that lives in my Israeli brother as lives in my heart, just knowing that we share the same Holy Spirit should unite us. Most of the time here it's the flesh that interferes in bringing hatred and bitterness into our lives. Unity in the body of Christ, peace between Israeli and Palestinian brothers, could be a light to this country. I can remember how my friends were amazed that I could sit with Israelis and talk with them and love them as I loved myself. It is a witness and a demonstration of true peace when we worship the Lord together. It is costly; we had many people saying bad things about our church because we had a Jewish group of believers come and help us in the church. We were accused of being traitors and having relationship with Zionists! Equally, for the Messianic believers it is costly. Imagine what their friends said when they heard they had been meeting with Arabs! Jewish believers and Arab Christians have to stick together and find practical ways to help and meet with each other. Christians who come here from the West must not hold any political position, rather they should hold the heart of Jesus. Don't take sides. In many ways the church here feels separated from the West; we need to feel love from the West to feel we are part of the Body. We also need practical help - people to help us with the harvest here, to minister among us here.”

Jack then went on to tell me how much he wanted to be a pastor. And so to meet him ten years later was deeply significant. Now as pastor of the Alliance Church in the Christian Quarter of Old City of Jerusalem, Jack told me how they are working amongst Palestinians in the West Bank. Numbers of believers are growing. House groups are forming. He can envisage a time when numbers grow to the point where churches are formed and cease to be 'underground'.