This past May, I set out with a group of pilgrims on a journey to Palestine. We were twenty-eight women from across the United States—some in school, some well into their careers and some retired. Our cover story was that we were Christians traveling to the holy sites. Underneath that story was another: as women offer something sacred and transformative in their encouragement and support of one another, we wanted to connect with our Muslim and Jewish sisters, all as daughters of Abraham. We wanted to share and engage with one another, experiencing the holy tears and holy laughter of sisters, mothers, daughters and wives. But underneath that story was the heart of the journey: an intelligence operation—we wanted our own boots on the ground to move us beyond general prayers for peace in the Holy Land, to bearing witness to the challenges of daily life for the Palestinian people.

My time in Palestine included a visit with Vera Baboun, Mayor of Bethlehem and Professor of Literature and Ethnic Studies at Bethlehem University. Naturally as a Literature professor, she inquired about my favorite writers. We bonded over our mutual appreciation of Toni Morrison. In particular, we spoke of the burden of the black body and larger themes of sacrifice and self-giving in Morrison’s Beloved. She encouraged me to think of the connections between the black experience in America, and everything I would bear witness to during and after my pilgrimage. As I left, she winked at me and with a wry smile said, “Bliss resides in the womb of suffering, learn to give it birth.”

Weeks later, I was sitting in the sanctuary of St. Gabriel’s Episcopal Church, in Brooklyn, NY where I served as the seminarian during the summer. One of my elderly parishioners sat with me, her eyes welling with tears as she held my hands in hers. She heard scanty news reports from Ferguson, MO that a police officer shot and killed an unarmed black man. We spoke of this nation’s need to confront the systematic subjugation of black people historically by enslavement and the Jim Crow laws, and, at present, in the prison industrial complex. Still reeling over the death of Eric Garner in Staten Island, she wanted to pray for peace and the safety of black people in America.

While there is a particularity to the black experience, there remains a connection between the struggles in Ferguson and Palestine which unmask a larger crisis of militarism.

Within hours after the shooting of Michael Brown, residents of Ferguson and the surrounding areas gathered to express their outrage and frustrations. The authorities imposed a state of martial law flooding our collective conscience with fleets of armored vehicles, teargas, rubber bullets and police dogs. Citizens voicing their concern met police officers dressed for war. How does this happen so quickly? How does this happen at all? Is this what happens when the military equipment from our campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan are sent to local police departments and often with the caveat that they must be used within one year?

At the apex of the conflict in Ferguson, I read reports of Palestinians sending messages to the people of Ferguson about the best ways to respond to their teargas exposure. I thought of the praxis of resistance connecting children of God across the world. As I delve into the womb of suffering, should this display of solidarity be heartening or disturbing?
Bliss resides in the womb of suffering, learn to give it birth. In his letter to the church in Rome, St. Paul writes, “we know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.” My own groaning about resistance to militarism causes me to find myself in the Upper Room. And at that table, I see Jesus charging his disciples to continue his resistance movement by confronting systems which assault the Kingdom of God. As a 21st century disciple, to ‘do in remembrance’ requires resistance.

‘Do in remembrance’ resistance is the understanding that we live in a world where it is not enough to raise young people to respect elders and those in authority. We need to supplement these values with honest conversations about the realities of what it means to be black in America. To be black and conscious in America is, in the words of James Baldwin, to be in a constant state of rage. This is the rage born from the unjust killing of another young black man. It is to be in a state of rage that despite repeating ‘I can’t breathe,’ Eric Garner remained bound in a chokehold by a man employed to protect him. Resistance demands that the Church live more fully into its moral authority in society.

My prayer is that as we continue to face racial discrimination, micro-aggressions and the emotional turmoil caused by being the non-white other in society, the church will prick the collective conscience of society to respect value all people as beloved children of God.

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I am an African-American single mother of two, a three year old daughter and a one year old son. I fear for my children as they grow older.

When I first heard about the shooting of Michael Brown, I was confused and deeply saddened that in 2014 such horrifying violence still occurs. I thought that in time, people of all races and origins would have more compassion and value the lives of one another. Seeing all the demonstrations and everyone who came out to show support gave me a sense of relief. Although there are still those who have hate and anger in their hearts, it is amazing to see how many people want to see the authority do the right thing--justice for Michael Brown.

As a mother of two young children, I feel deeply for Michael Brown's mother. As a parent you look forward to the joy of seeing your children grow and mature. You think of their graduations from high school and college, and hope for the day they marry and have children of their own. A mother's love-- a parent's love-- cannot be defined by words or put into a category of feeling. And the thought of a child's future and his life being snatched away is unbearable. My children are my world; they keep me focused and push me to be the best woman that I can be. Without them, I would not know what next to do or where to go. I simply cannot image the pain of losing a child. Not by the hands of someone whose job it is to protect and serve, not at the hands of any person.
As a Christian, I am disappointed that in a world where God has done so much for us, we, as people, cannot love one another. I cannot understand how there are still people out there who carry around such hatred. I hope that in the church, God-fearing people would not hesitate to voice their concern, understanding, and support. As God's children we should be there for anyone who needs us-- known and unknown. What's right is right, and we should not be afraid to take a stand.

I still have faith in people. And even though there are those who will never change, there are many who will fight for change. I am looking forward to the day when I will no longer have to worry about my children's lives being taken away just because they were being themselves, or look a certain way. I still believe that this day is possible and I will never give up hope. I teach my children to love God and that all things are possible through him. Rather than focusing on the broken things of the world, I focus on the good and live in hope, not only for myself, but especially for my children.

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