

June 16--Dominus Fleuet (Jesus Wept), Garden Gethsemane, Temple Mount, Pools of Bethesda, St Anne's Church, Antonio's Fortress, Via Dolorosa, Church of the Sepulchre, Tower David, Upper Room ,Gordon's Calvary, Garden Tomb

Nick Banks prayed. I have really learned to know both him and Kellie better—one of the things I truly enjoyed was meeting all the people on our tour. And a really nice thing is that most of us will see each other often, as we attend the same church.

We were heading back to the **Western Wall area again. Mondays and Thursdays are the big days for Bar Mitzvahs**—today is Thursday. Bar Mitzvah is for marking the move to adulthood for 13 year old boys—in the USA, we also have Bat Mitzvahs for girls, but this is not practiced in Israel. In a Bar Mitzvah, the 13 year old reads publicly, for the first time, from the Scriptures. Then the father says in a loud voice that he is no longer responsible for the boy—the boy is now a man.

We tried to visit **Temple Mount (Dome of the Rock)** when we were in Jerusalem. Although **there are Israeli police up there to keep the peace, the Muslims are in charge of the Mount (they were given that in 1967, and it is still true).**

- We all knew that we could not bring Bibles.
- We all knew that we needed to have our shoulders covered, and no shorts.
- That morning, Ronny Simon also said no male/female holding of hands, or touching.
- He also said that **if we didn't do what they told us to do, the Muslims can and will shut down Temple Mount to all visitors for the day.**
- As non-Muslims, we were all forbidden to enter the octagonal church that is now the Muslim Dome of the Rock—the Al'Aqsa Mosque--that Golden Dome you usually see when you see pictures of Jerusalem. But it is only part of a large area on Temple Mount, and this Temple Mount is the place where Solomon, and later Josiah, and later Herod built the Temple.

The Dome of the Rock is only one place on the rock mesa called Temple Mount. It is octagonal—built by Christians long ago for those 8 Beatitudes. The Dome covers one of two places on the Mount where bedrock breaks through and the bedrock is reasonably level. In Biblical, Jewish and/or Islamic traditions, that church marks the place where Abraham offered up Isaac, where Jacob had the dream of ladders to heaven, where God stood to finish creation after He had caused the dry land to appear, possibly the place of the original Temple, and something to do with Mohammed.

Back in the 1980's, when Mom went to Israel, she was allowed into the Dome. When I visited on the plane home with a Jewish American who had visited Jerusalem in the 1990's, he could enter the Dome. **This is no longer possible. Mom had to take off her shoes. We would have had to take off our Christianity, or secularism, or Jewishness, and become Muslim.** Look down, right now, at your clothing top. Look, right now, at your sleeves. If you have short, cap-like sleeves--that is immodest. If you have any kind of open neckline, like a V or a scoop--we are not talking exposing of breasts, we are just talking of an open neckline--the Muslims atop Temple Mount would

say you are immodest. I happened to be fine--my shirt sleeves ended shortly above my elbows, and I could button my shirt up to my chin, but **other women in our group were nearly in tears as we converted extra clothing** for them so they too could be covered up. That said a lot to me. **It was simply spite--but it happens every day.** We passed an old sign on the ramp up to the Temple Mount that said Jews were forbidden to even enter the area up there. That sign was put up in 1967 by the Mayor of Jerusalem. If this is an example, and not just local bullying by whichever Muslims happened to be in charge of eyeing visitors that day, **I hope never to have to live under Sharia Law.**

As I am typing up these notes, and thinking again about it, it seems that the **Muslims made a really stupid move up there on Temple Mount.** If they were trying to convince the world that Islam is a peaceful religion, that they are no danger to anybody, they would take care to treat visitors to Temple Mount as they used to do. The Jewish-American man on the plane, and Mom, were surprised to hear that non-Muslims could not enter the Dome anymore. When Vicki Barr went to Israel just a year or so ago, they could not enter the Dome, but they did enter Bethlehem—and we had planned to visit it too. This would have been a very good way for Muslims to convince the world that yes indeed they are a peaceful religion, they are no harm to anybody, and they have received bad propaganda against them. But this is Jerusalem today.

As we went on to the **Pools of Bethesda and St. Anne's Church**, the tinny sounds of the muezzin were sounding—and I was glad that as a woman I am free of Muslims as rulers and their Sharia law attitude toward women.

The Pools of Bethesda are run by Franciscan monks. It was good to see Christians again. Pastor Chuck was talking with 2 of the white-robed priests. I spoke with them later, and they shook my hand, thanking me for my prayers for them.

In **St. Anne's Church** we sat in the cool interior, and Ronny asked us to sing—so we did! **Once again it was a thrill to sing praises to the Lord together, and the acoustics in this old stone church were amazing.** The building was built by Crusaders around 1150 AD. As usual on holy sites, it was atop others, and one of the others was built in 450 AD on this site with the inscription to “Mary where she was born”. When the Muslims conquered Jerusalem in 1189, they did not destroy this church as they did so many others—they instead converted the relatively new building into a school for Islamic law. The church is close to the **Pools of Bethesda** where Jesus healed the sick man who had waited for 38 years to be healed when by being first when the waters to be stirred **John 5: 2-18.** This area is close to the **Sheep Gate**—where sheep were brought to the Temple for sacrifice.

We went to **Antonio's Fortress**, part of the **Via Dolorosa**, and the location of the 1st and 2nd Stations of the Cross. We read of the soldiers playing dice and gambling games—there was a **game board** incised into one of the paving stones. **Matthew 27:35.** The Stations of the Cross don't all come with Scripture references—the 6th has a woman named Veronica wiping Jesus' face as He carried the cross. These are old stories to be sure, but not in the Bible.

We continued walking the **Via Dolorosa**, through the **Armenian (Christian) Quarter**. Armenian Orthodox is one of the earliest Christian churches, coming out of the Greek, not the Latin side.

As we walked through the narrow streets, seeing little shops and street vendors, we looked up to see the neon lights for the Festival of Lights—we enjoyed that so much last night, and it will continue for several days. We looked down, and I saw a scrawny little half-grown cat, playing with a mouse. Somebody asked me if the mouse was dead, and I said the kitty hopes it isn't. There weren't any dogs, but everywhere we went in Israel there were cats, probably to control mice. There were huge trucks angling through the streets in places I didn't think any vehicle could make its way. There were times when I was simply amazed at how our own bus driver, Gabi, could negotiate making turns, including U-turns, in the crowded streets with our large bus. As we walked along, we glanced through an open doorway, and saw really ancient set of stone steps leading to an upper story of somebody's house. We looked through the bars of a fence, and saw an overgrown courtyard with old stones outlining gardens of a church.

When we came to the **Church of the Holy Sepulcher (Calvary)**, we saw a place claimed by rather a lot of Christian churches. Back in the 1800's there was some arbitrating council that carefully divided up everything—but neglected to list, and so assign, a workman's ladder carelessly left up against a middle window. I am sorry to say that that ladder has to stay there. Ronny told us that just last month a tussle/shouting match broke out between 2 types of Christians: something about a door being carelessly shut and the others thinking they were barred from the area. I was ashamed—at least we Christians ought to get along.

As we left this area, we saw some street vendors selling some absolutely wonderful “**race-track**” bread (long ovals baked of a coil of whole wheat bread with sesame seeds on it) with a **twist of paper** filled with an herb called **hyssop** to dip pieces of the bread. I am going to order some hyssop from the food co-op when I get home. The bread tasted just like my whole wheat sesame buns—I have to start baking again!

And then it was on to the **Holocaust Museum**. Children under 10 are not permitted—I myself couldn't stand to enter the Children's Memorial building where I understand there is only the sound of reading names of murdered children. Never Again--this must never again happen. Ronny Simon said that today the USA, Australia, New Zealand and yes, Germany, are Israel's best allies.

I walked along the aisles of trees planted, each for a “righteous Gentile”, like Corrie Ten Boom (the Dutch lady who hid Jews and got sent to camps herself where her father and sister died). I saw piles of shoes; I saw tresses of hair, used to match colors. The saddest thing I saw was a children's game that looked fun and comical—until you looked closely and saw that it was all hate-filled anti-Semitism. The Nazis used that to subvert the Hitler youth.

Our group split into two again: one wanted to go shopping in those little streets; Steve and I wanted to go to the **Upper Room**. It is now a part of a **Crusader stone building**, and **another place for singing!** Outside, Ronny told me a story from the early days of being a tour guide: he had a group of charismatic Christians, and this Upper Room, where not only the **Last Supper** was perhaps celebrated, but also was perhaps the place in Acts where on **Pentecost** (50 days after Passover, when Christ was crucified) the Spirit came with **tongues of fire**, and many people, of many languages, heard the Word in their own tongue and accepted Christ. **Acts 2: 1-21**. For the charismatic tour group this Upper Room was the high-light of their trip, and they asked Ronny to give them some time alone—to arrange with other tour guides, to do whatever, but to give them a bit of privacy. So Ronny did—and heard some very unusual sounds in that room! He looked in, and there they were all fallen down on the floor! He thought perhaps he needed to call the Israeli equivalent of 911, but just before he did one person caught Ronny's eye, and indicated that all was well. They were “slain in the Spirit”, and Ronny never forgot this!

Downstairs from the Upper Room is the traditional Tomb of David—there were places for men and places for women to go up to the green tarp-draped structure. There is some evidence that this lower place was a very early Jewish or Christian place of worship, so perhaps the Upper Room really was the place. **It seems absolutely amazing to me that I am looking on things built in Crusader times (1100 AD) as relatively new. What is this? 700-900 years old and I am naming it new????!**

As we waited for the shoppers to return, Ronny headed for a cup of coffee. Steve and I quietly followed him, figuring he would know the best places. I enjoyed reading the *Jerusalem Post*, an English newspaper I had picked up this morning in the hotel.

Then we went to the Garden Tomb, outside the old city walls. Because this is a fairly recent discovery, no churches have been built over the site, and the garden is peaceful and beautiful. There are various reasons people think this really is the site, but regardless, it was a good place to consider what Christ did for us; how He paid the penalty for our sins by his death on the cross; how He offers us salvation and forgiveness of our sins as a free gift to us; and how His tomb is indeed empty—He has risen indeed!

We sang songs—it really was great that Kathy had brought along sheets of words—and in between the songs, we took communion, and shared stories of what this trip had meant to us. To me, the terrible consequences of the partial obedience of King Saul really struck me—that and the willingness of nameless believers to die rather than reject Jesus Christ—I want to know what the will of God is for me, and then to do it, completely. For Steve, it was seeing this tomb, hurriedly chipped out to accommodate a larger person than originally designed, and most emphatically empty. We all had our stories—and then some other group, across the Garden from us, struck up the Old Rugged Cross. We didn't have the words to that one, but we knew it anyway, and sang along. There were times when people sang with us, too. Christ is indeed for all peoples.

Before we went to the plane (we flew out just before midnight), we ate a formal, farewell dinner at the American Colony. The song, “It is Well with my Soul”, was written in 1871

by a young American lawyer, who lost family and all in first the Chicago fire and then by shipwreck. In 1881 he and his wife and a small group of people left the USA to settle in the Holy Land, forming a simple community known as “The Americans”. They offered hospitality to their Jewish neighbors and to the Bedouins. A rich Muslim, Rabbah Daoud Amin Effendi El Hussein had built a huge house for himself and his four wives, but died, leaving no heir. “The Americans” first rented it and then bought it. Today it is a formal, very fancy hotel.

The meal was served in courses, and was the only non-Kosher meal we ate: we were delighted to have butter served for the bread, along with meat. After the meal, we thanked Ronny Simon for being our tour guide: Bob Sweeney, who has gone on many tours, and has come to Israel three times before, said that if all the guides were stacked up together, Ronny would be in the top 5-10. We thanked Gabriel (Gabi) our bus driver. We thanked Kathy Larsen, who had done so MUCH in planning this trip—I had visited with people in other tours, and watched—Kathy did a LOT. We thanked Pastor Chuck for all his Bible lessons—his reading of the entire Sermon on the Mount truly touched me—those 8 Beatitudes were like God speaking rather carefully to my heart. Then more people spoke—Pearl Pebble had always wanted to be an archeologist, and she was thrilled by the dig, but the part that spoke to her the most was the Golan Heights military post. She said she has never been active in politics before, but now, seeing those things, and thinking, she believes she will now take a role in US politics. And then **Chuck Larsen, Jr.**, “Chuckles”, who had been to Israel before, but now had time to listen to the stories, **said this trip has made him want to read the Bible more.**

That was it. I was truly happy that Ronny Simon came to the airport to help smooth and soothe our going through customs. We went through as a group: Pearl was asked by a man to tell what items had been given to us (our tour SarEl, gave us a baseball cap and a teardrop shape tote, and at the Garden Tomb we were given an olive wood communion cup). Then a bit later a woman came up to me and asked the same question—and said “yes, yes, besides the company cap and tote and communion cup”) We didn’t have to take off our shoes to go through the line (we always have to in the USA before flying), but they stopped me. I thought I had left something in my cargo pants pockets, but they said, “no, no, we want to check your shoes”—so they pulled me aside, I took off my shoes, they swabbed the toe and upper heel of my shoe, and ran the swab through a computer—I imagine they were testing for traces of bomb materials. I appreciate airline security, but it is nerve-wracking. Steve and I were asked together if we brought any food from Israel, and we both said no, simultaneously—and then, many hours later, in Phoenix, we realized we still had some of that racetrack bread in our teardrop shaped tote (We shared it with our group in Phoenix, when Kathy Larsen bought us all a cup of coffee after coming in from Philadelphia, and waiting for the final leg to Omaha). I don’t know what they would have done to us if they found out we were lying and had food from Israel in our backpacks. I thought of David and his brothers in Egypt, when little Benjamin’s pack was found to have some stolen goods.

The next day was a lot of travel—we finally came home Saturday, June 18, at 4:30 p.m.

Back in Blair, we anxiously found that our own home was safe from the flooding Missouri, though we had seen in Israel, on the Internet, that many farms and houses were flooded in Washington County. While we were gone, other people from Country Bible had helped flooding evacuees not only find shelter at Dana College (which was closed last summer and is vacant), but arrange for our church to feed a hot meal to the people staying at Holling Hall dormitory, and work with other churches and restaurants to set up a schedule for long-term help in the months the Missouri River will be flooding.

We will never forget this trip, the trip of a lifetime. But there is plenty of opportunity to serve the Lord each day, right here at home, working together with other Christians.