

Session Two: Reading the Signs of the Times

Objectives:

- To review the current situation in Israel-Palestine, the “signs of the times” that the Kairos Palestine document articulates and the Kairos USA document affirms.
- To begin to explore the “signs of the times” in the U.S., particularly how economics, media and politics shape how we relate to the situation.

Preparation:

- Before meeting, participants read Part I of Kairos USA.
- If the facilitator has chosen to use the Steadfast Hope curriculum, then participants should also read pp. 15-31 and 33 of Steadfast Hope.
- Secure a DVD player to screen excerpts from the Steadfast Hope (2011) DVD

Welcome and Review (5 min)

- Open with a reading of Lk 12:54-57
 - “Jesus also said to the crowds, ‘When you see a cloud forming in the west, you immediately say, ‘It’s going to rain.’ And indeed it does. And when a south wind blows, you say, ‘A heat wave is coming,’ And it does. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret conditions on earth and in the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret the present KAIROS? And why don’t you judge for yourselves what is just?’”
- Review:
 - Kairos theology is a theological reflection on what is going on “on the ground” in one’s context, i.e. “reading the signs of the times.”
 - What are the “signs of the times” this document is reading?

Reading the Signs of the Times in Palestine (65 min)

- Introduction:
 - The Kairos USA document is a response to the Kairos Palestine document. It thus deliberately uses the description of the signs of the times found in that document (*refer to Kairos Palestine, Section One, “The Reality on the Ground,” as well as the first part of Part I of Kairos USA, “Injustice in Palestine.”*)
 - For those who have not been there, it is difficult to grasp fully what is going on and why this is such an urgent issue. So, we are going to see some of what is going on “on the ground” through video.
- Screen Chapters 2, 3 and 8 of Steadfast Hope (46 min)
- After screening, discuss:
 - What words, phrases or images stood out to you (*list on the board or on flipchart*)?

- What questions does what you saw raise for you?
 - ...as a U.S. resident?
 - ...as a Christian?
- At the beginning of the Kairos USA document, the South African Kairos documented is quoted:
 - “This is the KAIROS, the moment of grace and opportunity, the favorable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action.”—“The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church,” South Africa, 1985
 - If this is the current situation “on the ground,” why do you think the Palestinian Christians felt now was the moment of “grace and opportunity,” a “Kairos moment in which God issues a challenge to decisive action?”

Break (10 min)

Reading the Signs of the Times in the United States (30 min)

The Kairos USA document is a response to the Kairos Palestine document, in that it affirms and lifts up the Palestinian Christian reading of the signs of the times in their context. But Kairos USA is also responding to what is “on the ground” in the U.S. context, and the enormous significance of our context to the situation affecting Palestinians and Israelis.

- Let’s look at some of what is going on in our context now.
- *Show selections from chapters 4 & 5 of Steadfast Hope (20 minutes: show 42:30~52:00 in Chapter 4 and 54:41~1:03.53 in Chapter 5)*
- *After screening, discuss:*
 - What are some of the dynamics described in these video clips that affect how we in the U.S. relate to this conflict?
 - These clips deal briefly with some of the larger economic and political aspects of how the U.S. is involved in Israel/Palestine. How does this relate to us as individuals?
 - What are some other factors about our context that impact how we in the U.S. relate to this conflict? (this might include how we get our information through media sources, cultural affinities with Israel, political allegiances, etc.)

What is our Kairos moment? (7 min)

On page 6 of Kairos USA, it states:

“The focus of this Kairos initiative is on Israel and Palestine, reflecting the growing recognition of this longstanding and worsening human rights situation as an urgent

challenge to our churches and our world today. At the same time, we are aware that this is only one of many issues facing us as we strive to follow the prophet Micah's injunction to 'do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.' It is our hope and prayer that the wisdom and courage we bring forth in answering the call for justice in Israel and Palestine will strengthen and deepen our awareness of other ways in which our nation's political, economic and ethical actions must be brought into harmony with Jesus' call for a world in which all share in God's peace."

- In light of our reading of the "signs of the times" here in the U.S., why is it so important that we as US Christians pay attention to this particular issue of Israel-Palestine?
- At the same time, the Kairos USA document acknowledges that there are many aspects of injustice that US Christians seek to address. What are other examples of injustice or issues of concern that we can understand better or differently in light of our reflection on the way US governmental and ecclesial structures work in response to Israel-Palestine?
 - *Note: it works best to allow the group to make its own connections, but some connections you might suggest include:*
 - *Discrimination and civil rights*
 - *Tax money for weapons and prisons*
 - *Rights of indigenous peoples, or other groups that have been removed from their lands*
 - *Our military presence abroad, wars in the Middle East*
 - *The federal budget and the priorities it suggests*
 - *Immigration and the walled border between the U.S. and Mexico*
 - *Destruction of natural resources*

Closing Reflection (3 min)

- *Re-read Luke passage*
 - "Jesus also said to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud forming in the west, you immediately say, 'It's going to rain.' And indeed it does. And when a south wind blows, you say, 'A heat wave is coming,' And it does. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret conditions on earth and in the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret the present KAIROS? And why don't you judge for yourselves what is just?'"
- What is at stake for us as Christians in "reading the signs of the times" here and elsewhere and responding to them?

Total estimated time = 120 minutes