

So, on this World Communion Sunday, we will take time here shortly to pray for nations around the world, including some who have endured the worst of atrocities. Of course, that hasn't just recently been the case for Israel and Palestine in recent months, but for much of their respective histories. And yet, somehow, somehow, hope can still emerge in the bleakest of circumstances.

And so, I want to tell you about a woman named Idit Harel Segal, who just turned 50 recently. However, she wanted to do something different for her milestone birthday. Instead of receiving gifts, she wanted to give one, and not just any gift, but to donate her kidney to a complete stranger. It was meant to be a living tribute to her grandfather, who died a few years ago: a Holocaust survivor, who taught his beloved granddaughter to live out the Jewish faith in such a way that there was no higher duty than to save a life.

Segal took that to heart, and not just applying it to people who lived in her home country or shared the same faith tradition. Instead, the complete stranger to receive this gift of new life was a 3-year-old Palestinian boy living in the Gaza Strip: a place that, again, has endured some of the worst of atrocities. Nevertheless, this kindergarten teacher insisted that that child's life was worth saving.

Segal, a proud Israeli citizen, must have been under the impression that a Palestinian was cared for by God, too. When she donated her kidney, she wrote a letter to the child:

*You don't know me, but soon we'll be very close because my kidney will be in your body. I hope with all my heart that this surgery will succeed, and you will live a long and healthy and meaningful life. I threw away the anger and frustration and see only one thing. I see hope for peace and love. And if there will be more like us, there won't be anything to fight over.*

Except, amidst the conflict between the two sides just before the procedure, three relatives in Segal's family died. With that in mind, some of her family staunchly opposed Segal giving up her kidney, worried that it would risk *her* life in the process. One of those dead set against it was her own father, who stopped talking to her altogether. That was even before she mentioned about a Palestinian being the recipient.

However, the night before the surgery, her father called, barely audible over the phone as he was crying, attempting to put together his words to her. Soon enough, Segal let him know that her kidney, her gift of hope for peace and love, was going to a young boy in the Gaza Strip. There was silence for a while before her father said, "Well, he needs life also." And for that briefest moment in this never-ending saga between two countries seemingly set on annihilating each other, a family on each side gave not just their respective homelands, but the world, an awe-inspiring bit of hope.

And I cannot help but think of the father's words, "Well, he needs life also," a holy moment of unexpected grace;

I cannot help but think of those very words revealing the deepest feeling God has for us. That those words must have been in God's heart when Jesus emerged out of Bethlehem and Nazareth, because, "Well, [we] need[ed] life." Those words must have been in Jesus' heart when he went to the cross and came out of the tomb: "Well, [they] need life." Those words must be the reason why the Holy Spirit soars within us each and every day, because, "Well, [they] need [abundant] life!"

So, on this World Communion Sunday, we are mindful that even in the bleakest of circumstances in nations all around this planet, hope can somehow, someday, emerge. And no matter how much so many people have seemingly lost all hope imaginable, God insists on the whole world being thoroughly covered with a love in which hatred and anger and hostility stand absolutely no chance to survive forever. We cannot help but do our part to pray for all the nations undeniably adored by this universal God. And for those who will never make the headlines like Idit Segal, who bless us with the hope to fall in love with the Good News all over again, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed!

Amen!