

SIMPLE GIFTS

AN AMERICAN FOLK SONG Reflected upon in Palestine

This is always a spellbinding time of year. Thanksgiving, in America at least, has evolved into a holiday so uniquely, well ... American. It's chaotic and commercial. This is not judgment but it is an observation. One that I feel I can make from where I sit here in Palestine: a place that doesn't exactly observe "Turkey Day" in the same way. Instead, the Christians here genuinely gave thanks during a Sunday worship service nearly a month ago in accordance with the church calendar. They, like we Americans, had a harvest to pray for and to give thanks for. It was an olive harvest.



A lone olive hangs just above my reach at the top of a beautiful tree. The simple experience of olive harvesting has been a true gift.

I'll always remember the first Thanksgiving during which I heard *Simple Gifts*, the old Quaker tune about simplicity. It reminded me to be grateful for things that I receive every day. The things that I find myself grateful for each day have changed here in the West Bank. Some of these things include friendship, new knowledge, simple experiences, and food.

SIMPLE GIFTS

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.

I know how easy it can be to surround myself with things that I really don't need. It is a habit of mine to feel thankful for things that don't give me life. But I am discovering quickly that having too much can make one just as unhappy as having too little. What gives me life is the love in my caring host family, the true friendships I am developing, the new things I am learning, the great food I am eating that has been so thoughtfully shared, and the experiences I am having each day.

One, simple day for me will look a lot like this:

6:00 – 7:20 a.m. : Wake-up, breakfast, and prep

7:30 a.m. – 2:05 p.m. : School in Ramallah

3:00 – 3:30 p.m. : Usually a nap goes here

3:30 – 4:30 p.m. : Lunch

4:30 – 6:30 p.m. : Extra time for Arabic study, reading, writing, or catching up on funny YouTube clips

6:30 – 8:30 p.m. : Often a time spent with friends in the community or our host family. We often try to squeeze and evening meal in here too.



Another experience. This time, my friends and I were taking a cooking class. Photo credit: Calla Gilson.



The stunning Al-Aqsa Mosque, a place. We observed this holy ground on a beautiful, sunny day in Jerusalem. Photo credit: Calla Gilson.



The city in which I serve: Ramallah, Palestine.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT MY YEAR ABROAD, PLEASE CHECK OUT MY BLOG AT WWW.ELIINPALESTINE.COM