

Perspective

Sermon preached at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

March 1, 2026

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Yesterday morning we awoke to the news that the United States and Israel have launched a large military strike on Iran.

Our Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe writes [in his letter to our Church](#):

This violent attack comes despite weeks of negotiations that many of us had hoped would prevent armed conflict in this fragile region, which is home to so many religious traditions and faithful people.

...

As news reports tell us of fear and panic in Iran, I ask you to pray especially for the people of the Diocese of Iran and for all of the Iranian people.

In recent weeks, we have mourned as the regime in Iran has killed peaceful protesters, and watched with alarm at both its increasing repression of the Iranian people and the escalating response of the U.S. government.

As Christians who follow a Prince of Peace, we mourn that today's attacks will surely mean further hardship for the most vulnerable Iranians and, as retaliation inevitably follows, suffering that will spread across the entire region.¹

Beloved, here we go again - the news is difficult and traumatizing. The storm of the world's chaos rages about us. Recall our conversation last Sunday, as we began our Lenten discussion of Hanna Reichel's book, *For Such a Time as This*. First, we find calm.

Reichel's suggestions are simple, but important:²

Don't let the storm control our emotions.

Don't let the storm direct our responses.

Don't give the storm more power.

Don't let the storm steal our focus.

And once we have grounded ourselves in calm, they suggest our next step involves discernment and orientation.

Asking ourselves:³

What times are these?

What are they calling for?

What tasks do they put before us?

Where should we look for wisdom?

As counter-intuitive as this may seem - we begin to answer these questions by allowing ourselves to **feel**. Because feelings are a natural response to what we are experiencing, we have to let ourselves feel them. Which means we can't shut down, or refuse to engage the situation

we find ourselves in. We have to admit we are angry, or frightened, frustrated, exhausted - whatever we're feeling.

Reichel explains:

Because we like to limit our vulnerability,
we tend to limit, avoid, or repress the feelings it causes.
But doing so makes us no less vulnerable,
it only makes us numb and brittle.⁴

One of the greatest dangers in times of mounting crises is desensitization.
Exposure to violence leads to normalization of violence.

Reichel states, "It is no exaggeration to say that our humanity is at stake in preserving our ability to feel."⁵ It's important that we allow ourselves to be affected by the world around us. That we give ourselves permission to feel our feelings. Empathy is a muscle - we need to strengthen it. Doing so requires time and space; it requires attention and some care.⁶

And the next step Reichel recommends extends the process of engaging the world around us. Do our research. Find facts. Read widely.⁷ Gather wisdom from as many credible sources as we can. Seek out contrasting opinions and experiences. Ask questions and listen to what others have to say. Reach beyond our normal sources of information, stretch beyond our comfort zone.

Consider our Gospel text this morning - as Nicodemus seeks out Jesus in the middle of the night. To ask Jesus questions, to discover more about what he has been teaching. And for his part, Jesus takes the time to explain his identity and mission to this interested, well-educated Jewish leader who has asked to hear more.⁸ Nicodemus has begun to suspect that Jesus has indeed "come from God" - though he's not yet convinced. Through this conversation with Jesus, Nicodemus comes to learn the truth as it is embodied in Jesus - the truth of God's love for the world.

This morning we have the chance to practice this step of gathering wisdom from a variety of credible sources, as we hear a slightly different perspective on the war in Iran. The Presiding Bishop of Jerusalem [issued a letter to his people](#) - the Province of Jerusalem & the Middle East. In that letter, Bishop Naoum writes :⁹

Tragically, the cycle of violence has expanded with terrifying speed.
In the hours following, Iran launched a widespread reprisal, with missiles and drones targeting Israel and U.S. military assets across the Gulf - striking installations in Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kurdistan-Iraq, Jordan, and Qatar. Sirens also blared across the Holy Land, warning of incoming missiles from Iran. Suddenly, our people from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf find themselves once again huddled in shelters, fearing for their lives as the shadow of a total regional war looms over us.

These developments strike at the very soul of our Province of Jerusalem & the Middle East. Every single nation now engaged in this combat, and those bearing the brunt of the retaliatory strikes, resides within our ecclesiastical boundaries. Our brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Iran are currently enduring the terror of aerial bombardment; our members in the Diocese of Cyprus & the Gulf are witnessing the arrival of war at their doorsteps; and our faithful in the Diocese of Jerusalem extending across Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria face an unprecedented threat of military escalation.

Bishop Naoum's request to us all:¹⁰

First, I call upon the global Church to join us in urgent, unceasing prayer. We implore God to protect the innocent - the mothers, the children, and the elderly - who are caught in the crossfire of this "Operation Epic Fury" and the subsequent "crushing responses." ...

Second, we must offer each other the sanctuary of Christian love. I therefore urge our clergy and laity to be beacons of comfort. In a time of "regime change," rhetoric and military ultimatums, let our message be the unchanging promise of Christ's peace ...

Finally, we must remain "Bridge Builders." Even as diplomatic windows seem to slam shut, the Church must keep the doors of reconciliation open. We refuse to see our neighbors as enemies, whether they be in Tehran, Tel Aviv, or the military bases of the Gulf. I extend an urgent invitation to the wider Anglican Communion and all people of goodwill: Intercede for us now. ...

Friends, this leads us back to the closing piece of advice in the first section of Reichel's book. Their last piece of wisdom for us today is: not to go it alone. They note that different approaches can form a division of labor. Different ideas can strengthen one another. Different energies can build momentum.¹¹ Reichel writes:¹²

Even as you feel lonely and distressed,
there will be friends to be found in times such as these.
But there are also friends to be found in other times and other places.

Befriend those who would teach you how to live through these times.
Listen to their wisdom.
Let their words and experiences give sharper contours to your own.

Learn from their successes and their failures.
Let them caution and encourage you.
Then put yourself to work
so that you would do the same for others.

Which brings us back to Jesus and Nicodemus. Even though they come from different perspectives, they take the time to share ideas and theology. To listen with respect. It's through their conversation, that we are assured - God so loves the world, that God sent God's own son, in order that the world might be saved through him.

Beloved Ones, in the days ahead, let's be brave together. May we have the courage to discern the steps before us: refusing to become desensitized to the suffering of others, and engaging different perspectives with a willingness to learn from them. So that we can be fully present to and for this world that God so loves. Amen.

¹ Letter from Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe on Military Strike on Iran, February 28, 2026, Office of Public Affairs, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/publicaffairs/letter-from-presiding-bishop-sean-rowe-on-military-strike-on-iran/>

² Reichel, Chapter 1, Find Calm, p 10.

³ Hanna Reichel, *For Such a Time as This, An Emergency Devotional*, Eerdmans, September 4, 2025, p 6.

⁴ Reichel, p 14.

⁵ Reichel, p. 16.

⁶ Reichel, p. 16.

⁷ Reichel, p. 25.

⁸ Gospel: SALT's Commentary for Lent 2, posted February 23, 2026, [Saltproject.org](https://saltproject.org)

⁹ Letter from The Most Reverend Dr. Hosam E. Naoum Primate and President Bishop, to the Province of Jerusalem & the Middle East, posted 28 February 2026; https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Image-2.jpeg.pdf?mc_cid=34eeb488e3&mc_eid=06b4228be9

¹⁰ Letter from The Most Reverend Dr. Hosam E. Naoum

¹¹ Reichel, pp. 34-35

¹² Reichel, p. 37.