



"I FELT THE LORD'S PRESENCE"

FROM EDINBURGH TO NAZARETH



INTERVIEW

RACHEL MORRIS
SHARES HER
EXPERIENCE AS A
VOLUNTEER AT
SERVE NAZARETH

How did you find out about SERVE Nazareth?

During the church search at my Freshers week at university, I met a girl, and we talked about what we had done in our gap years. She told me she had been in Nazareth. During the summer of 2019, I was looking for what volunteer work I could do, gaining some experience related to psychology – my career path – and thinking: "I would love to go to Israel". I remembered what Sarah said, I got in contact with her, and she told me about SERVE. It all looked great, so I applied.

So when you were out in Nazareth, were you able to apply some of the

knowledge you had learnt at university?

A little bit. I was in the Nazareth Village three days a week and in the psychiatric ward in the hospital three days a week, helping with occupational therapy. There were limits to what I could do because of the language, but it was still fascinating to observe and be there.

How long did you stay in Nazareth?

I was in Nazareth for four weeks in June 2019.

What sort of tasks did you do during your volunteering programme?

When I was at Nazareth Village, I was dressed in traditional clothing. I helped in the kitchen and the land. In the kitchen, I cooked for the visitors. While serving the guests, I explained how the food was related to the Bible. Chris Tomlin, a famous worship singer, came to Nazareth Village when we were there. I like to tell people that I poured Chris Tomlin a glass of water dressed as a 1st Century Nazarene. It's quite a cool fact!

What sort of tasks did you do in the land?

There were lots of little daily tasks, but we were also playing a role for the visitors, so they could get a clear





picture of what it would have been like in Jesus's day. That involved harvesting cucumbers, threshing some wheat, picking the leaves from the grapevines, etc. We set up a little cart with some vegetables and coins (widow's mite) mentioned in the Bible. The guests would come by, and we would be acting as our role: that was really fun. If I had been there longer, I would have loved to lead tours around the Village, as they needed more German-speaking tour guides. I do speak German, but it's not my first language. I think it would have been too hard to learn the script and lead tours in that month. Especially on the land, in between the guests coming, there was lots of time for reflection, talking with other volunteers, just soaking in the fact that I was there. I literally couldn't think of a better way to experience what it would have been like for Jesus as a man growing up: being in Nazareth, wearing 1st Century clothes, walking between the olive trees and taking some apple cores to the sheep and the donkeys.

What is your favourite Biblical food or meal?

We would serve a lentil soup based on Jacob and Esau, and the bread was so good. One of the guys would cook flatbread in a big cast iron stove over a fire. I ate a lot of bread, hummus and zaatar. Zaatar is probably my favourite thing: a Middle Eastern herb mix of sesame and thyme.

What did you enjoy the most while working at the Village?

A real highlight for me was interacting with the guests, who came from all over the world. The way they perceived me was pretty interesting. Some of them would try to speak Hebrew with me, thinking I was a local. If you are going to the Nazareth Village, it's most likely because Jesus is an essential part of your life. It was so special for me to be in Nazareth and the Village, and I knew it was the same for them. Knowing it's the love of Christ that

unites us.

How was your experience helping out at the occupational therapy sessions?

Very different. I was mainly doing observations at group sessions. The occupational therapist would lead various activities: art therapy, crafting, playing board games, etc. It mostly was a discussion, so not understanding Arabic was quite challenging.

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"Knowing it's the love of Christ that unites us"

Sometimes the conversations would get quite intense or emotional, and I had no idea what was going on. Despite the challenges, I was able to see it as an opportunity to observe





Rachel (third from left), SERVE director Christine Farah (second from right) with other volunteers

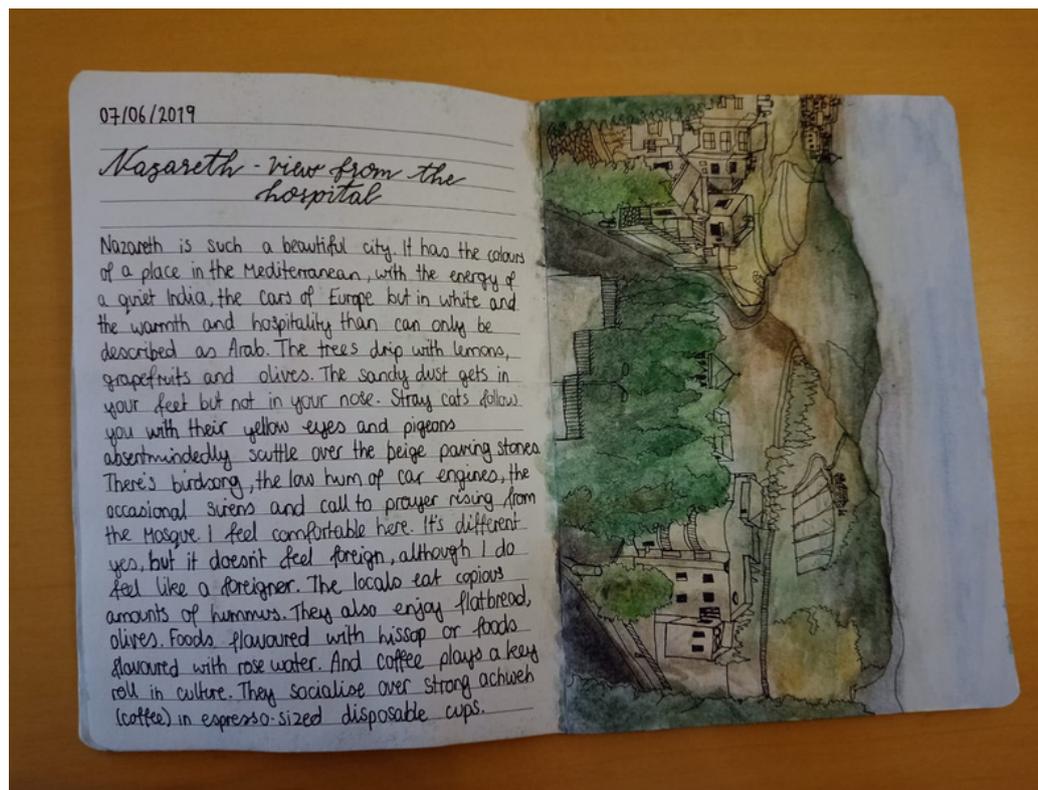
the body language and silently pray for the people there.

What did you enjoy the most from your experience?

I would have to say everything, but the trip to Galilee was exceptional. The night I arrived, they told me we were going to Galilee the next day, and I was so excited! I was reading my Bible, and I was like: "Oh my goodness! There will be fish in the sea of Galilee that are descendants of the fish that Jesus ate". If you look out across the sea from the boat, the modern-day things blur out: you just see the hills. I remember thinking: "This is what Jesus would have seen with his physical eyes". That was so incredible for me. I felt the Lord's presence. When we arrived on the boat, an African church group was playing music and dancing. We joined, and then a group from East Asia joined as well. We were all dancing together, filled with so much joy. There was something so beautiful about it that I will never forget.

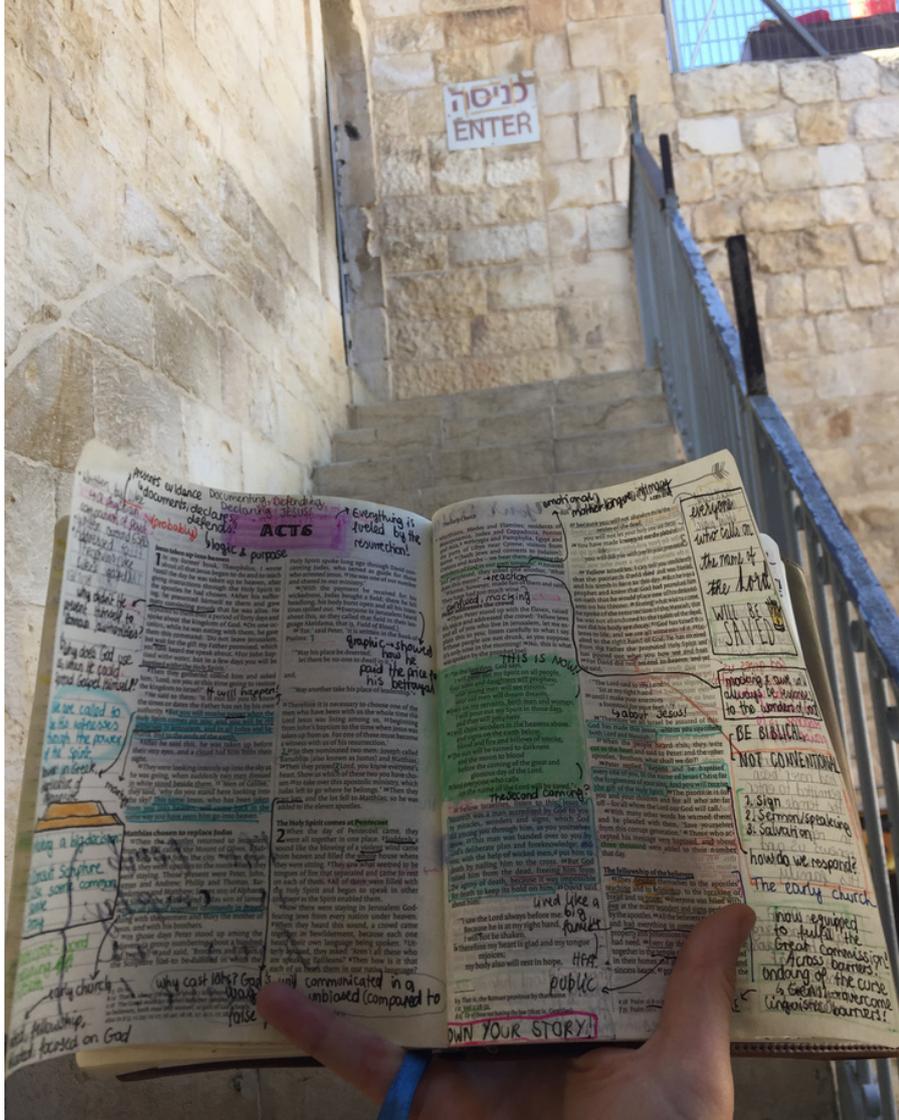
I don't think so, as I have been immersed in different cultures before. I brought this little book, where I did some paintings and reflections:

PAINTING AND REFLECTING



Did you experience any culture shock when you arrived in Israel?





incredible experience. But also, that you'll meet amazing people. I went by myself, and I wasn't sure if I would meet anybody else. Jane and Christine were so great in welcoming us and helping us acclimatise. When I was there, there were around six volunteers from all over the world: Germany, the United States, New Zealand, Canada, etc. They were friends with a few local girls, and we would do Bible study together. That was really precious: to be encouraged by everyone's faith.

Nazareth is a diverse city, with different religions and cultures coming together. How did you experience that?

The great learning experience for me had two sides. The historical and biblical side, but also learning about the religious and political situation today, with all its complexities. Nazareth, mainly being Muslim, was a new experience for me. I found it very interesting to hear from the Arab Christians because they were a minority within a minority, hearing about the challenges they face and learning about the community.

What did you learn from the experience?

I learned a lot from the other volunteers: they came from different backgrounds and understood Christianity in different ways. I learnt so much about the humanity of Jesus. It's so easy to read the Bible in Edinburgh. But when you're actually standing there, it becomes very tangible and human. So often, I could relate to Jesus being surrounded by

that environment, the climate, and the olive trees: this is what Jesus would have experienced in his day-to-day. I liked to go to different places, open a part of the Bible where it's talking about it, and take a picture. This is from Jerusalem, where I visited the Upper Room, so I had Pentecost open. (see picture above)

Did you meet someone inspiring?

Yes, one girl who was also a volunteer there. It was really lovely getting to know her. She really inspired me because she was facing quite a hard time and encountering a lot of struggles from all different avenues, but she just dealt with it with so much grace. And that was a beautiful thing to see.

We are hoping to welcome international volunteers in the near future. What would you say to someone who is considering joining the SERVE programme?

It's amazing; you should definitely do it; I highly recommend it! It's an

